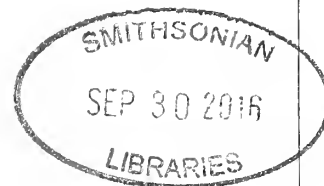


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# the PHOENIX

Number 10 December 1993



Compiled and distributed by Michael C Jennings (ABBA Co-ordinator)

for contributors to the Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia

## Interim Atlas Completed

At the end of the tenth year of the ABBA project we have reached an important milestone on the completion of the *Interim Atlas*. This was finished in November 1993 and the intention is that it should be produced quickly for distribution not too late in 1994. The primary purpose of the *Interim Atlas* is to publish a broad outline of the breeding range of Arabian birds and provide basic information on status, habitat and breeding biology. Secondly, it aims to stimulate observers to pay special attention to those areas, and species, which are poorly recorded at present. The *Interim Atlas* includes species maps for 198 breeding birds and there are narrative accounts for a further 30 species. It also provides information on 26 other species which almost certainly breed or might be proved to do so soon. Introductory chapters cover the factors affecting bird distribution in Arabia, habitats and bird communities (18 zones/habitat types are discussed), the changing avifauna of Arabia and conservation. The species accounts give basic information on breeding biology and nesting periods, nest site and nesting habitat etc, as an aide to observers so that they may, more successfully, prove breeding in the final phase of the project. See 'Progress so far' in this issue for more information about the *Interim Atlas*.

Those who wish to register an interest in obtaining the *Interim Atlas* when it becomes available are requested to

return the slip enclosed with this newsletter. I have no idea yet how much it might cost but I hope there will be plenty of free copies to distribute to people who have contributed records to the project. It is particularly important that contributors who have not been directly in touch with me in the last year let me know their present address.

The final phase of the Atlas project will start soon and it is hoped it can be completed, with NCWCD sponsorship,

within three years. The final Atlas will include records extracted from a review of published works, as well as records for the period prior to 1954 and after September 1993, which are not included in the *Interim Atlas*. With so much historical data available to the Atlas project, information on historical range changes will be included in the final Atlas format. The intention is that the species accounts in the

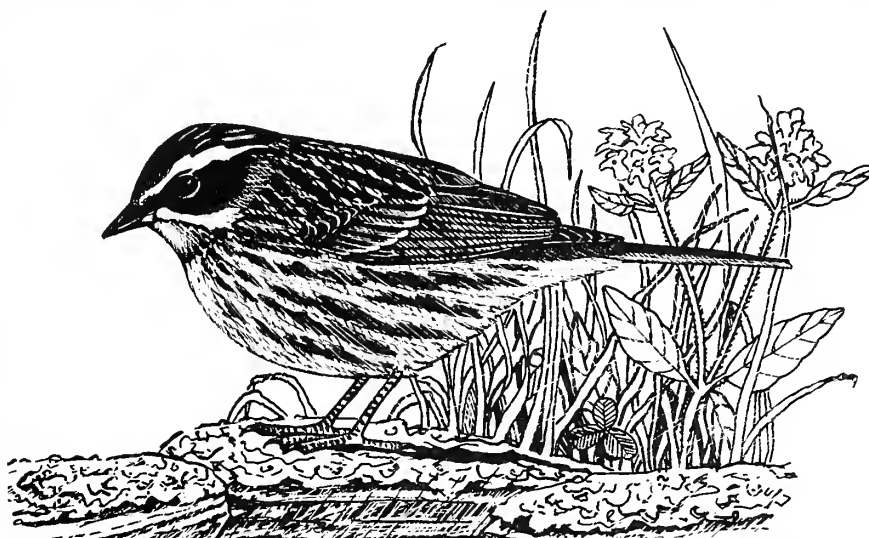
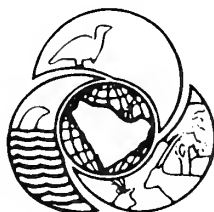


Fig 1 The OSME survey of Yemen in Spring 1993 found Arabian accentors *Prunella fagani* nesting (KA05).

final Atlas will be thorough records of the status, breeding and biology of each species that breeds in Arabia. The plan is that ornithologists with special experience of individual species breeding in Arabia will be invited to author the accounts for those species, or groups of species.

There is still much work to be done on the Atlas project, and more information is needed on the breeding biology of almost all species. Atlassers and birders are urged to concentrate their efforts in the remaining period and continue to report all their observations, especially if they can improve upon data published in the *Interim Atlas*.

Sponsored and Published by the  
National Commission for Wildlife  
Conservation and Development (NCWCD)  
P.O.Box 61681, Riyadh  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



الإشراف والنشر بواسطة  
الهيئة الوطنية لحماية الحياة الفطرية  
وإنماها.  
ص ب ٦١٦٨١، الرياض.  
المملكة العربية السعودية

I have completed ABBA surveys 13 and 14 since the issue of *Phoenix* 9. Survey 13 was to the southern Tihama in the extreme south west of Saudi Arabia in December and January 1992/93. The highlight was a huge colony of cattle egrets found on New Year's Eve with eggs and young. Survey 14 was to the north east of Saudi Arabia, to a triangle formed by Riyadh, Dhahran and the Kuwait border. North east Arabia was exceptionally wet this year and many species had only just begun to show any breeding activity, except notably eagle owls of which several nests were found. Visiting birds to the north east at that time included three black and one griffon vultures, *Aegypius monachus* and *Gyps fulvus* near Kuwait and several flocks of dotterel *Charadrius morinellus* and Caspian plovers *C. asiaticus*.

Survey 15 is on schedule for the Jebel Ahkdar in northern Oman in December and January 1993/94 and Survey 16 to a poorly attlated part of north west Saudi Arabia in April 1994.

## New Breeding Species

Those contributing to the ABBA project have, on average, in the last ten years added about three species each year to the list of Arabian breeding birds. On that background it seems almost a disappointment that in the last 12 months only one new breeding species has been confirmed, malachite kingfisher *Alcedo cristata*. However, another

On the administrative front, the project foundered slightly during autumn 1993, through a cash flow problem. As a result the literature review and data capture processes which were being handled by Anne Jones and Penny Harbard had to cease. This was a great disappointment for us all as we had worked together well in the previous year. Hopefully Anne and Penny can rejoin the project in the final phase.

With the imminent publication of the *Interim Atlas* I would like to record my sincere thanks to the 160 or so people and organisations who have contributed records to the project in the past 10 years. This has been a terrific response and the end result is the most authentic source of information on Arabian breeding bird distribution yet. But there is still a lot to do and I hope all those who are able will strive to fill the gaps in knowledge in the coming years.

*Michael Jennings*

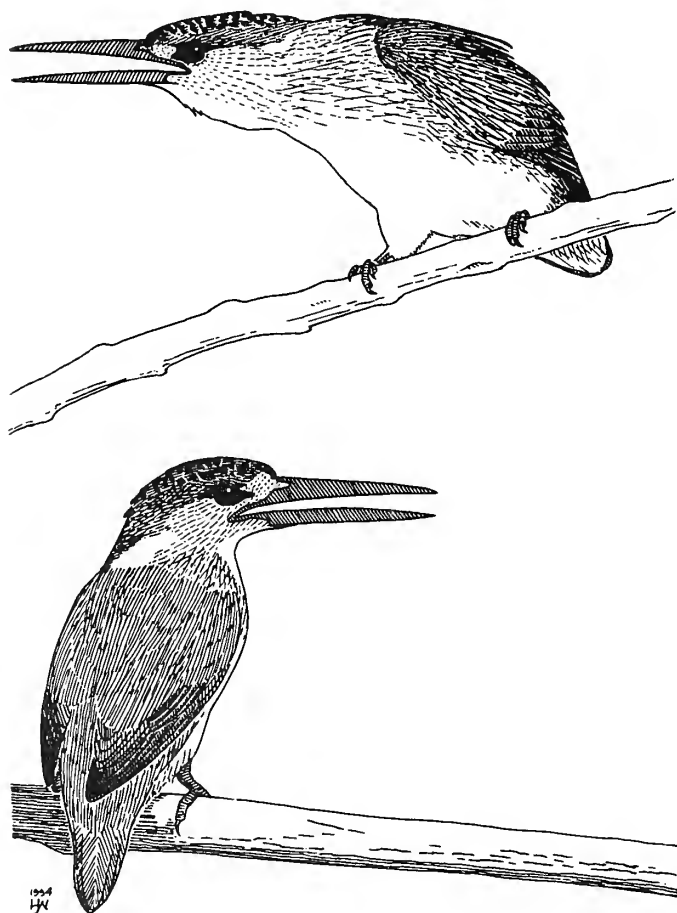


Fig 2 A pair of malachite kingfishers *Alcedo cristata* were observed and nesting was presumed in Wadi Hajar, southern Yemen by the 1993 OSME survey.

species, corn bunting *Miliaria calandra*, seems from recent records to be a scarce breeding bird. Perhaps the greatest excitement in the last year is the confirmation of breeding of greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber* in UAE. The first breeding for the best part of a century. (See separate article later in this issue).

### Malachite kingfisher presumed breeding in Yemen

In the early morning of 29 March 1993, during the course of the two-month long OSME Yemen Survey, Dave Farrow discovered an apparent pair of malachite kingfishers *Alcedo cristata* in Wadi Hajar (OB05), west of al Mukalla. Wadi Hajar is a wide valley with a permanent water course, the upper reaches have been irrigated for agricultural purposes. The birds were seen at the seaward end where the sandy soils support dense stands of Mesquite trees *Prosopis juliflora*. Most members of the survey were able to study the birds before departure for al Mukalla later in the morning.

The birds were constantly bringing small prey items into the area of observation, however no nest was located, despite the birds appearing to be waiting to feed young. One of the pair sat with a fish in its beak for more than five minutes before eating it. It is possible that a nest hole was still being excavated, as a small entrance (4 cm across) was found in the bank, 1 m above the waterline.

This record is the first documented occurrence in Yemen, and the first evidence of breeding in the Arabian peninsula. There are two previous claims for Yemen; a bird was collected at Wadi Khun, east of Tarim on 16 February 1932 by Col Boscawen and there was an unsubstantiated sight record in 1984 from the Hadramaut.

Full details of this recent record will be published in *Sandgrouse* in due course.

G Kirwan, 6 Connaught Road, Norwich, Norfolk NR2 3BP, UK.

## Corn Bunting possibly breeding at Hamraniyah, UAE

Evidence is mounting that corn bunting *Miliaria calandra* breeds in the north of the UAE, around the irrigated hay fields at Hamraniyah (WA28) in the Emirate of Ras al

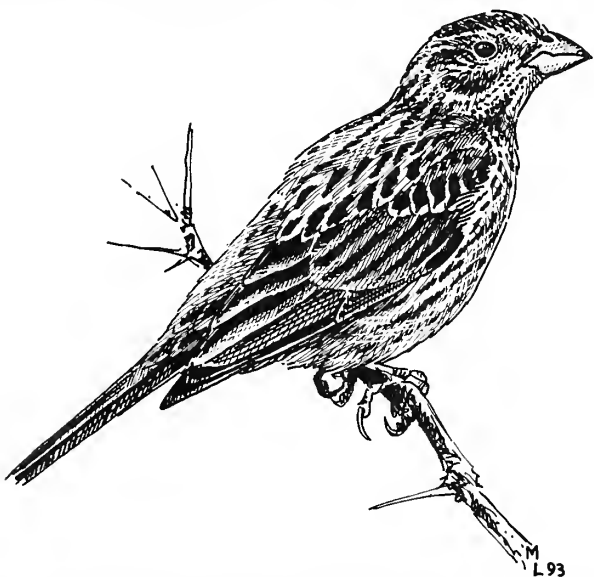


Fig 3 At least three male corn buntings *Miliaria calandra* were singing and copulation was noted in the northern UAE, Spring 1993. (C Richardson & J Bannon)

Khaimah. Males have been heard singing at several sites, far enough apart to suggest several pairs may nest, although to date no eggs or young have been found.

Winter records of corn bunting in the UAE are irregular and some years it is unrecorded. On 17 January 1992 I found one calling 'chip...chip' continuously from the top of a Ghaf tree *Prosopis cineraria* in a 100 ha hay field, south of Ras al Khaimah airport. Six were present there on 24 January, and when MCJ and Rob Morris visited the site on 28 February and 1 March they heard a singing male (*Phoenix* 9:9). There were no further corn bunting records that spring.

In the winter and spring of 1993 the species was very hard to find at Hamraniyah. However, on 22 January John Bannon located three males in full song and on 28 February Klaus Handke and I found two males singing shortly before sunset in locations about 300 m apart. Whilst we watched a male, which had been singing from the top of an irrigation pipe, flew up to an electric cable where a female was sitting. To my surprise copulation then took place. This seemed to confirm our suspicions that they may breed. However, in subsequent months, during five more visits to Hamraniyah, no further birds were seen and no other breeding proof was obtained.

C Richardson, PO Box 50394, Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

## Recent Reports

Some Atlas reports are especially interesting, perhaps on account of the species concerned, an unexpected location or habitat, an unusual time of breeding or a large number of birds involved. The following is a selection of some of the more interesting, unexpected or unusual records of Arabian breeding birds received within the last 12 months; some relate to earlier years. Reports of unusual breeding birds often get reported by more than one observer. Care is taken to credit records as appropriately as possible, so apologies if the original finder of a rare bird is not properly identified.

### Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Three young in a mangrove tree nest, south of Jeddah (FA19) August 1993. (G R Lobley)

### Knob-billed duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos*

A male has been present near Salalah for a year and has crossbred with a mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* and produced offspring, (*Oman Bird News*: 13:4-5; 14:3 & 12). This species is widespread in Africa and the Indian region and a natural occurrence from either region is quite possible given its highly mobile, wide-ranging habits (in Africa). An escapee seems unlikely.

### Black vulture *Aegypius monachus*

Three together (with a griffon vulture *Gyps fulvus*) Dibdiba (MB34), extreme north east Saudi Arabia, February 1993 (MCJ & M al Salama). This is thought to be the largest 'group' recorded in Arabia. There is still no firm evidence that this species breeds.

### Lappet-faced vulture *Torgos tracheliotus*

One at a dead lamb (IA12) Tihama, extreme south west Saudi Arabia 25 December 1992 (MCJ & A Suhaibani). First

Tihama record. An almost fully fledged young bird in a huge tree nest, Jebel Mahdha (YA21) Oman June 1992. (Oman Bird Record)

### Griffon vulture *Gyps fulvus*

Two birds near Ghayl (WA27) UAE, August 1993 (S J Aspinall). Species scarce in UAE, these were possibly migrants.

### Verreaux's eagle *Aquila verreauxii*

One over cliffs at Tarim (PA09) Hadramaut Yemen, October 1993 (N Redman). Also a pair Wadi al Lasbah (JB03) Yemen, November 1992 (J F Walsh). New areas for the species.

### Bonelli's eagle *Hieraetus fasciatus*

One nearly full grown nestling being fed by two adults, Wadi Hinna (UB11) Dhofar, April 1992. (Oman Bird Record)

### Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*

Probably 60-70 present at Fahal Island (YB24) northern Oman, some almost certainly with young in the nest, September 1992 (Oman Bird Record). Also bred Delma Island (SA26) and Sir Bani Yas Island (SB25), UAE, September 1993. (S J Aspinall)

### Quail *Coturnix coturnix*

Calling from long grass northern UAE (VB28) 20 March & 3 April 1992. (C Richardson)

### Houbara *Chlamydotis undulata*

Adult with a 'third-size' youngster, central Oman, December 1992. (Oman Bird Record)

### Black-winged stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Has bred for first time in Kuwait (NB35), eggs in June 1993. (C Pilcher)



Fig 4 Breeding records of sooty falcons *Falco concolor* were reported from islands in northern Oman and the UAE in 1993.

**White-tailed plover** *Chettusia leucura*

Three pairs bred in 1993 at the same site near al Khobar (QA29) where they first bred in 1992 (*Phoenix* 9:3-4). A nest with eggs was found on 22 March and there were five juveniles present 31 May 93. (G Ramsay/J Barker)

**Rose-ringed parakeet** *Psittacula krameri*

A pair nested in a hole in a factory wall 40 ft above ground level at al Khobar (QA29). Adults were at the nest site from February to September, with young seen from 1 July (G Ramsay). There are still very few confirmed breeding records for this species.

**Bruce's scops owl** *Otus brucei*

Nest with young Ras al Khaimah (VB28) July 1993 (S J Aspinall). Also six birds with at least two juveniles (still with down) northern Emirates, June 1993. (E Hirschfeld)

**Little owl** *Athene noctua*

A pair of adults and three juveniles at a quarry (RA27) Qatar, May-June 1993. (R Harding, J Oldfield)

**Blue-cheeked bee-eater** *Merops superciliosus*

Copulation 21 May and 35 fledged young, 6 August 1992, al Habab fodder fields (VB27) near Dubai, UAE. (C Richardson)

**European roller** *Coracias garrulus*

Recorded in northern UAE (WA28) in late June 1993. (E Hirschfeld)

**Singing bushlark** *Mirafra cantillans*

About 250 including recently fledged young, Salalah (UA11) Dhofar, August 1992 (Oman Bird Record).

**Dunn's lark** *Eremalauda dunni*

A nest with a brood of two, 9 September (HB21), (S Newton). A very late breeding record.

**Red-vented bulbul** *Pycnonotus cafer*

Nest building Riyadh 26 April 1992 (P Andrew). First breeding report for Saudi Arabia. Also hybrids (presumably with white-cheeked bulbul *P leucogenys*) RA26, Qatar March 1993. (J Oldfield)

**Blackstart** *Cercomela melanura*

A nest containing young in Dhofar (VA11) had pebbles at its entrance (Oman Bird Record). (See note in *Phoenix* 9:28).

**White-crowned black wheatear** *Oenanthe leucopyga*

Male singing in limestone hills (OA31) extreme north east, Saudi Arabia, February 1993 (MCJ) Possibly the most north easterly record.

**Reed warbler** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

At least two singing males east of Abu Dhabi, UB25, UAE, June 1993. (E Hirschfeld)

**African paradise flycatcher** *Terpsiphone viridis*

Nest with three eggs Raydah escarpment (IA13), 19 June 93 (S Newton). There are very few confirmed breeding records for Arabia.

**Pale rock sparrow** *Petronia brachydactyla*

More than 50 in song on hillside UAE (VB27), 4 April 1992. (C Richardson)

**Arabian waxbill** *Estrilda rufibarba*

Two flocks (c20 and c40) in Tarim (PA09) Hadramaut, Yemen, October 1993 (N Redman). Most easterly record.

**Trumpeter finch** *Bucanetes githagineus*

Pair in limestone hills (OA31) extreme north east of Saudi Arabia, February 1993 (MCJ). Possibly the most north easterly record.

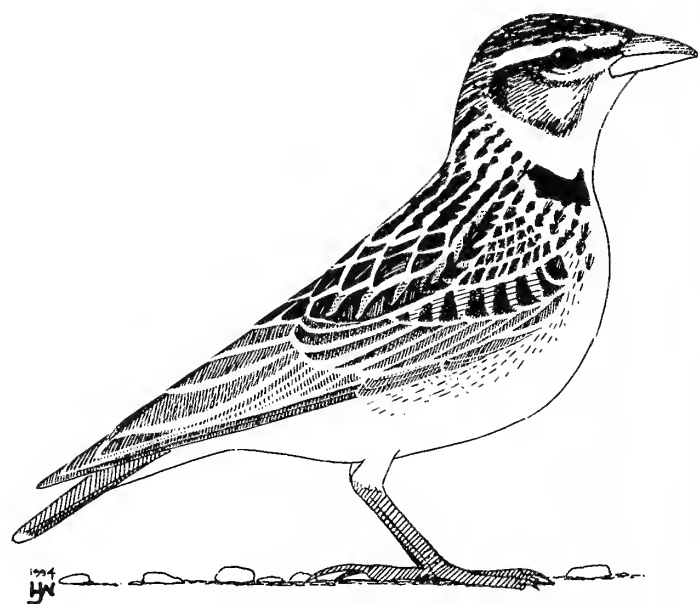


Fig5 The second Arabian breeding occurrence of bimaculated lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata* was confirmed from Karan island in 1993.

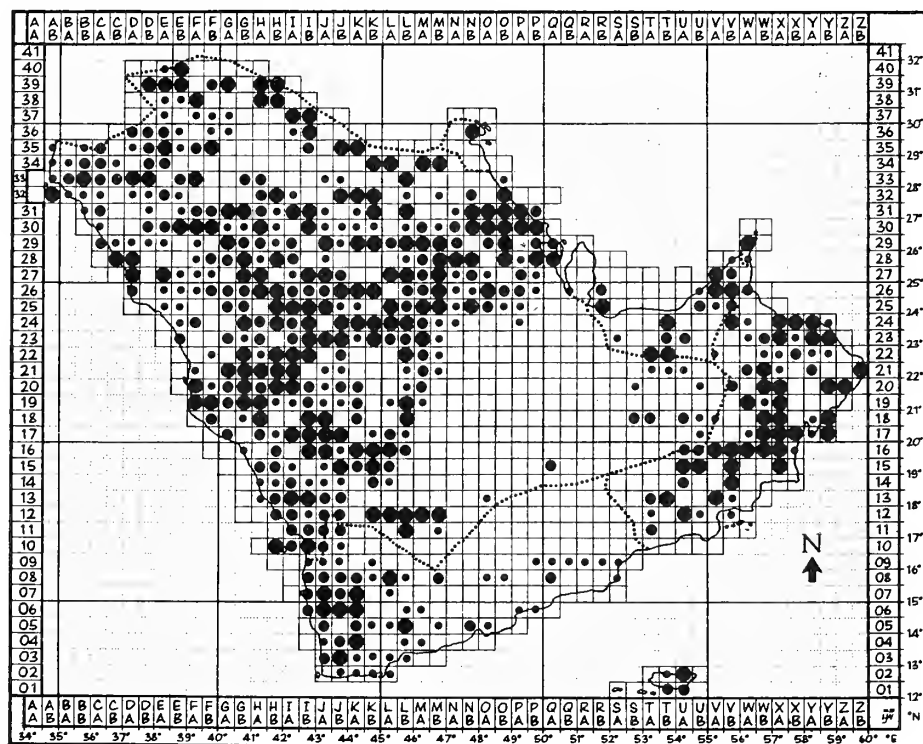
# Progress so far -

## Brown-necked Raven

The brown-necked raven *Corvus ruficollis* occurs throughout Arabia, including some offshore islands, the highest mountains as well as the remotest of deserts. Because of this habitat flexibility and the ease with which it is observed it has been recorded more often and over a wider area than any other species. Because of this the species has been used

to plot progress of the ABBA project over the last ten years. With the completion of the *Interim Atlas* it is appropriate to include here the 'BNR' map and species account, as an example of the 228 breeding species (198 maps) which are dealt with in the *Interim Atlas*. A second species account and map for the sand partridge *Ammoperdix heyi* is also shown. Note that the typestyle and map format used here are not those which will actually appear in the *Interim Atlas*, as these aspects have not yet been finalised.

Fig 6 & 7 The distribution map and species accounts for the brown-necked raven *Corvus ruficollis* and sand partridge *Ammoperdix heyi* as examples of the contents in the *Interim Atlas*. Maps are compiled solely from observer records received by the ABBA project since 1984.

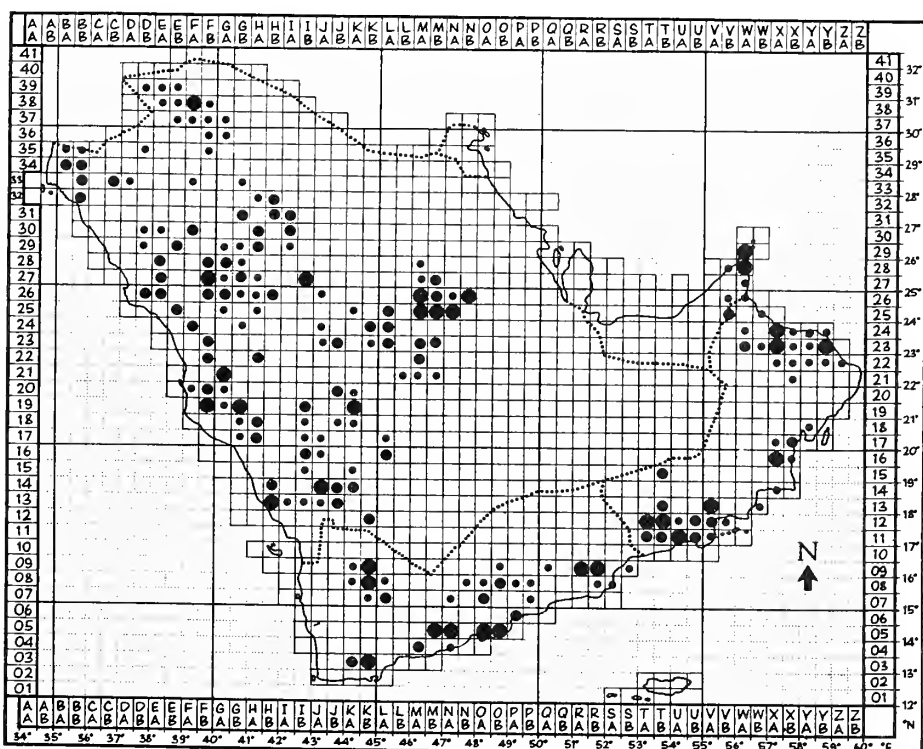


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## BROWN-NECKED RAVEN

### *Corvus ruficollis* (Map 172)

Widespread resident throughout Arabia, including some large islands, the highest mountains and the Empty Quarter. Extinct Bahrain since 1970. Usually found in pairs or family groups. Shuns built up areas except after the breeding period when flocks of over 1,000 have been recorded near towns. Young in the nest February to June (*Phoenix* 2:4, 4:7). The large stick nest is lined with grasses, feathers, wool and rags and placed in a tree or on a rock ledge. If no natural site is available, will readily nest on any undisturbed manmade structure, a metre or more above ground level.



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## SAND PARTRIDGE

### *Ammoperdix heyi* (Map 42)

Widespread resident in rocky desert and highlands. Prefers the drier eastern slopes of the western highlands to the wetter west side and summits. Not found in the north east or near the Gulf coast. Chicks usually recorded March to May but very young chicks observed every month, except February and October. Nests on the ground in or beside vegetation.



## Sites of Interest

Atlas work is absorbing and rewarding. The common birds can be ticked off in each new square visited, the absence of expected birds becomes intriguing and a challenge and the presence of unexpected birds is always exciting. On each visit to a familiar square, the observer can try to upgrade the previous BEC's obtained. Because of the surprises and the fact that many parts of Arabia are still unexplored ornithologically, all sites can be of interest to the atlaser. In this column the aim is to provide details of the variety and diversity of bird habitats throughout Arabia and the representative birds to be found in each. This series of site reports is not meant to be a 'where to watch birds in Arabia' or a directory to the most prolific bird sites, although a number of them are exceptionally good bird areas. In this issue there appears articles from bird islands in the Gulf and the Red Sea.

Observers are asked to submit details of other sites, especially those that they have studied reasonably well, drawing special attention to the breeding and resident species that occur. A site may be as small as a sewage pond or similar microsite, an urban area, or a whole mountain range.

### Judhaym Island: Gulf of Salwah, Saudi Arabia

Judhaym island is located at 25°30'N, 50°10'E (QA27) in the Gulf of Salwah in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, some 30 km southwest of Al Uqair. It is only 2.5 km from the coast, is surrounded by very shallow water, is 2.5 km long and some 250m at its widest point, and with an elevation not exceeding two meters. The surrounding intertidal zone largely consists of extensive rockflats. The vegetation on the island is dominated by five halophytic plant genera. On the low, sandy storm berm *Arthrocnemum macrostachyum* and *Suaeda vermiculata* are the dominant plants. The sandy central parts of the island have a relatively sparse vegetation of *Seidlitzia rosmarinus* bushes, while in the many muddy, shallow depressions a rather rich vegetation of *Halocnemum strobilaceum*, *Halopeplis perfoliata*, and *Arthrocnemum macrostachyum* is found.

The breeding avifauna on Judhaym is the most diverse found on any of the Arabian Gulf islands of Saudi Arabia. The crested lark *Galerida cristata* is the only terrestrial bird which nests but there are no less than seven marine bird species nesting on the island. A pair of osprey *Pandion haliaetus* occupies one of its six nests on the island every year. In 1992, three eggs were laid in the first week of December, two of which had hatched by 9 January 1993, despite the persistent cold and wet weather of that period. Only one chick survived on 23 January. Eighty to 100 pairs of western reef herons *Egretta gularis* breed. In 1991, eggs were found from mid March to the end of April located on top of *Arthrocnemum* and *Seidlitzia* bushes.

Breeding terns arrive in the Gulf of Salwah in April and start breeding shortly after. The distinctive and well-preserved remains of a breeding colony of lesser crested terns *Sterna bengalensis* were found in December 1992, proof that about 2000 pairs bred that year on the island. Numerous

smaller colonies of white-cheeked terns *Sterna repressa* are scattered over the entire island, as are the nests of bridled terns *Sterna anaethetus* which are placed under the cover of the vegetation. Although no exact counts for these two species are available, the amount of old nests and remains of dead chicks found in December 1992 indicate that the total number of breeding pairs of both species must be in the low thousands. In contrast with the other tern species, the Caspian tern *Sterna caspia* breeds on Judhaym during the winter months. On 19 November 1992, three chicks from three to five weeks old were found on the northern tip of the island. Three weeks later, on 11 December, another chick of four weeks old was found on the southern tip, as well as a nest with two freshly broken eggs, probably destroyed by a herring gull *Larus argentatus*. Thus at least four, possibly five pairs of Caspian terns were breeding on the island in the winter of 1992/93. These records represent the first breeding proof for this species along the Saudi Arabian Gulf coast. The presence of eggshell fragments indicated that at least one pair occupied an old Socotra cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigroregularis* nest.

The Socotra cormorant is perhaps the most spectacular breeding bird on Judhaym. On 13 January 1992, 9,600 incubating Socotra cormorants were counted from a helicopter. In the next breeding season, an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 chicks from three to five weeks old and some 60 incubating birds were present at the colony on 19 November 1992. Three weeks later the number of incubating birds had increased to an estimated 4,500. All these nests were abandoned during the last week of December 1992, due to persistent wet and cold weather. The colony on the nearby Zakhnuniyah island (QA28) situated at 25°33'N, 50°19'E, (which held a reported 50,000 nests in 1981, Gallagher et al. 1984, ICPB Tech Pub 2:421-456) was totally deserted for at least three successive years 1990-1992, and so the Judhaym colony represents the only large Socotra cormorant breeding colony left in Saudi Arabia. This, together with the rich diversity in other breeding birds, should be reason enough to add this island to the growing list of protected areas in the Kingdom. However smaller colonies are known from the Gulf area of Saudi Arabia, from Unaybir island (24°55'N, 50°44'E, QB26) where there were 1000 pairs in 1981, (Gallagher et al. 1984) and 128 birds there on fresh eggs 24 January 1993 (there were about another 1000 adults and at least 500 recently fledged juveniles present on the island at the same time), and Kurayn island (27°39'N, 49°50'E, PB32) which had 60 nests in 1991/92, (PS pers. obs.)

Surprisingly, there is no mention in the literature of the ornithological importance of Judhaym. It is suspected that in several earlier publications, e.g. Bundy et al. 1989 (*Birds of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia*); Gallagher et al, 1984, this island was wrongly referred to as Samamik. Samamik according to the local coastguards, is a small islet adjacent to the southern tip of Zakhnuniyah, about 7 km northeast of Judhaym.

Our survey on Judhaym was part of the study carried out under a European Economic Community contract, with financial support from the EEC Commission, Brussels, and the NCWCD, Riyadh. We are grateful to Benno Boer for the identification of plants.

P Symens, Wildlife Sanctuary for the Gulf Region, PO Box 11071, Jubail 31961, Saudi Arabia.

M Werner, Institut für Zoologie, Technische Hochschule Darmstadt, Schnittspahnstrasse 10, D-6100 Darmstadt, Germany.

A Suhaibani, NCWCD, PO Box 61681, Riyadh 11575, Saudi Arabia.

### Islets near Yanbu al Bahr, Red Sea

According to Evans (1987) in *Key Environments, Red Sea* Pergamon Press (pp 315-338) the main concentration of sea-bird colonies along the Saudi Arabian coast of the Red Sea, north of the Tropic of Cancer, are located on the al-Wedj Bank (ca CB28). In addition it has also been known for some time that islets north of Yanbu al Bahr support breeding colonies of seabirds (Moore and Ormond, 1982, *Seabird Survey: Northern Saudi coast, August-September 1982*, unpublished MS). Evans (1987) suggested that these islets probably held up to 100 pairs of breeding seabirds.

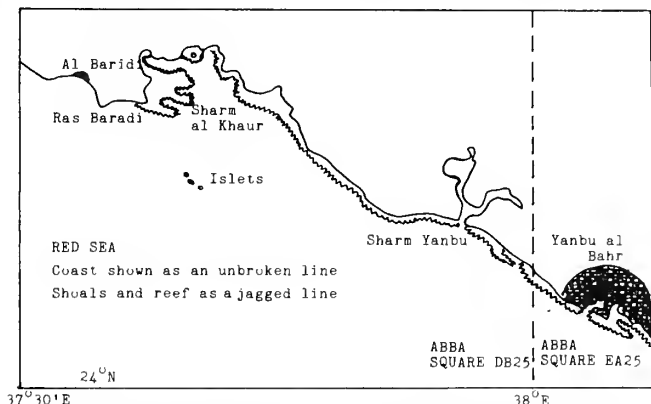


Fig 8 Position of three islets near Yanbu (DB25) where probably at least 700 pairs of terns of three species were found nesting in 1993.

The islets are situated in the lee of the southern end of the peninsula, at Ras Baridi (DB25), on the outer fringe of Sharm al Khaur, see map. Extensive seagrass beds are present within the shallow waters of the sharm and these support important fish nurseries. There are three islets, all are uninhabited, although the largest is visited by local fishermen. They are labelled from south to north for the purposes of this note as Islets A, B & C. Islet B is the smallest and is connected via a coral flat that is exposed at low summer tides to Islet C. All three islets support bushy vegetation - probably *Halocnemum strobilaceum*.

During 1993 I visited the islets on three occasions with Ian Vickors, on 5 February, 18 June and 13 August. (Dr Graham Lobley accompanied us in June.)

In January, Islet A had an osprey *Pandion haliaetus* nest with four eggs and there was also a pair of highly agitated Caspian terns *Sterna caspia* present, these almost certainly had young. Islet C also had two pairs of nesting ospreys; one nest with three eggs, and another with two eggs, in addition there were several old nests.

In June, Islet A held a mixed roost of about 70 whitecheeked terns *Sterna repressa*, 45 bridled terns *Sterna anaethetus* and 12 lesser crested terns *Sterna bengalensis*. All the terns were in full breeding condition and the latter two species were partaking in 'dreads'. (Some or all birds suddenly quitting

the beach to fly low, swiftly and silently seawards in a dense flock.) A full-grown juvenile osprey was present on the beach. No seabirds were seen on Islet B but on Islet C there was a pair of sooty gulls *Larus hemprichii* - an interesting record.

In August breeding was proved for white-cheeked, bridled and lesser crested terns on Islet A. A minimum of 80 pairs of white-cheeked terns were seen, either sitting or with young. An estimated 25 pairs of bridled terns were feeding chicks. The lesser crested tern population was estimated at 10 pairs, with adults bringing food to chicks and a fully-grown juvenile, just capable of flight, was also seen. In addition, at least two swift terns *Sterna bergii* were present and both were highly agitated and constantly gave loud alarm calls. Two non-breeding white-eyed gulls *Larus leucophthalmus* were present, as were three ospreys.

On Islet B there were no breeding terns but 2-3 loafing Caspian terns and two white-eyed gulls were present.

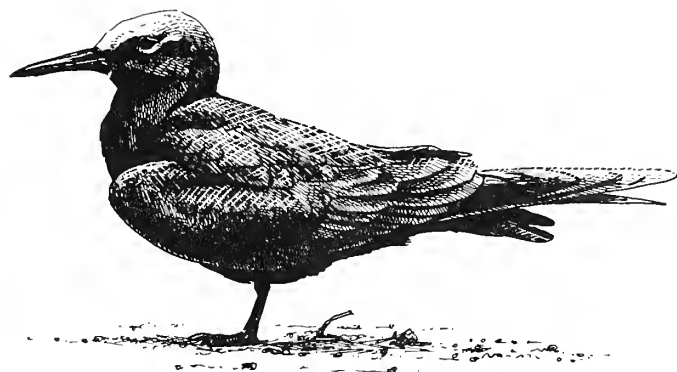


Fig 9 Three common noddies *Anous stolidus* were recorded north of Yanbu in the Red Sea in 1993.

On Islet C there was a large mixed colony of white-cheeked terns, bridled terns, and one or two swift terns. Lesser crested terns were absent. This islet was clearly the most important colony locally for white-cheeked and bridled terns. No free flying young white-cheeked terns were seen, but probably at least 10% of the young bridled terns were fully fledged, many in typical first-autumn mottled juvenile plumage. Several of the juveniles were to be seen loafing on an exposed reef away from the colony. It was not possible in the time available to get an accurate count of the number of breeding birds present but at least 1000 birds were counted in the air on one occasion, with a tentative estimate of 400 breeding pairs of white-cheeked terns and 150 breeding pairs of bridled terns.

On each occasion the islets were visited a similar route was taken from Sharm Yanbu. After leaving the mouth of Sharm Yanbu we followed the fringing reef for approximately 20 km north, before going due west to the islets. Sea birds seen en-route were as follows. In January at the mouth of the Sharm Yanbu there was a single brown booby *Sula leucogaster*, 50 herring gulls *Larus argentatus*, 150 black-headed gulls *Larus ridibundus*, and two each of slender-billed gulls *Larus genei*, lesser crested terns and Caspian terns. In June we observed only one lesser crested tern and nine white-eyed gulls at the mouth of the Sharm Yanbu but about 15 minutes out, along the fringing reef there was a bridled tern, a pair of lesser crested terns and

two Saunders' terns *Sterna saundersi*. Three large all-dark terns, which crossed over the boat, were almost certainly common noddies *Anous stolidus*. Common noddies have been seen on the al Wedj bank (Moore and Ormond, 1982) but there are still no breeding records further north than Jedda. Within the Sharm al Khaur there were 12 white-cheeked terns and four lesser crested terns (all in breeding plumage) and two little/Saunders' terns *Sterna albifrons/saundersi*. In August the only seabird seen at the mouth of Yanbu Sharm was a brown booby (resting on a bouy), along the fringing reef, 10 white-cheeked terns were

observed fishing on the outward trip, while within the Sharm al Khaur an additional 15 white-cheeked terns were feeding. A single Saunders' tern was also observed.

Our observations show that the number of terns nesting on the islets increase the importance of the islets as a breeding site for seabirds, as assessed by Evans (1987), by as much as ten fold, especially for bridled and white-cheeked terns.

*B Meadows, 9 Old Hall Lane, Walton-on-theNaze, Essex CO14 8LE, England.*

## Breeding birds near the main towns in Arabia

A very valuable aspect of the ABBA database is that records can be sorted by almost any field. Not just by species but also by date, observer, breeding evidence, atlas square, country etc. One service available to ABBA contributors is a listing of breeding birds in their home square showing the highest breeding evidence code achieved so far for each species.

Although a complete print-out of all species breeding in each of the 1200 squares or so squares in Arabia has not yet been prepared, the square that appears to have the most breeding or probable breeding species is IA13. This is on the edge of the Asir escarpment of south west Saudi Arabia and includes the Raydah protected area, a good slice of the

foothills and parts of the Tihama. In this square 52 species have been confirmed to breed, a further 19 are probable breeders and 23 are potential breeders, 94 in all.

In the accompanying table the breeding species for the squares containing 13 large towns in Arabia are shown. Looking at these squares the most well endowed towns, in terms of confirmed breeding birds in its vicinity, appears to be Salalah in southern Oman, followed by Muscat, Riyadh and Dubai/Sharjah. At Aden only eight birds are confirmed to breed (from records received since 1984). This probably reflects more the paucity of ABBA reports from that part of Yemen rather than few breeding birds.

Anyone wanting a printout of the species breeding in their own square should send a self-addressed envelope to the Co-ordinator.

### Breeding birds in the atlas squares containing the main towns in Arabia

Town and Square	Confirmed Breeding BEC 10-16	Probable Breeding BEC 3-9	Potential Breeding	Total Species
Tabuk, CB33	14	4	12	30
Jedda, FA19	18	18	19	55
Dammam, QA29	28	10	23	61
Riyadh, MB26	37	10	24	71
Kuwait, NB35	11	10	20	41
Manama, Bahrain QB29	15	7	6	28
Doha, Qatar, RB27	17	2	8	27
Abu Dhabi, UA25	20	5	15	40
Dubai/Sharjah, VA27	37	19	30	86
Muscat, YA24 & YB24	43	6	20	69
Salalah, UA11	46	11	28	85
Sanaa, KA07	32	28	14	74
Aden, KB02 & LA02	8	17	50	75

## New Books

The aim of this recent literature section is to give details of new books which are, in some way, relevant to the study of birds and wildlife in Arabia or to the Arabian/Middle Eastern environment generally. Most titles mentioned are available in good book shops in Arabia, Europe and North America. Others are on restricted distribution or privately published and readers wishing to obtain copies should contact the author, publisher or distributor mentioned.

Alternatively all the titles reviewed in this issue and earlier *Phoenix* issues may be ordered through Subbuteo books - see advertisement below. When ordering through a library or agent quote the ISBN or ISSN number if given. The prices shown here are published prices, which sometimes include post and packaging. Recommendations made about books are based on the standard of treatment of the subject, format and quality of preparation. A recommendation does not necessarily mean good value for money. Readers are asked to provide details of other new relevant titles not mentioned in this survey.



## BIRDS OF BAHRAIN

by Tom Nightingale and Mike Hill, 1993

Measured in terms of birdwatchers per square kilometre Bahrain is probably the most intensively observed corner of Arabia. It was the first state in Arabia to receive its own regional bird book (Strickland and Gallagher; 1969: *A guide to the birds of Bahrain* and the centre of the first ornithological group active in Arabia, the Gulf Bird-Watchers, who published a newsletter during the period 1969-71. As there has hardly been a break in observations over the last 30 years this new book presents a precise picture of all the birds resident in and visiting Arabia's smallest state. It is a book which is much overdue but certainly worth waiting for. This book is not claimed as an identification guide

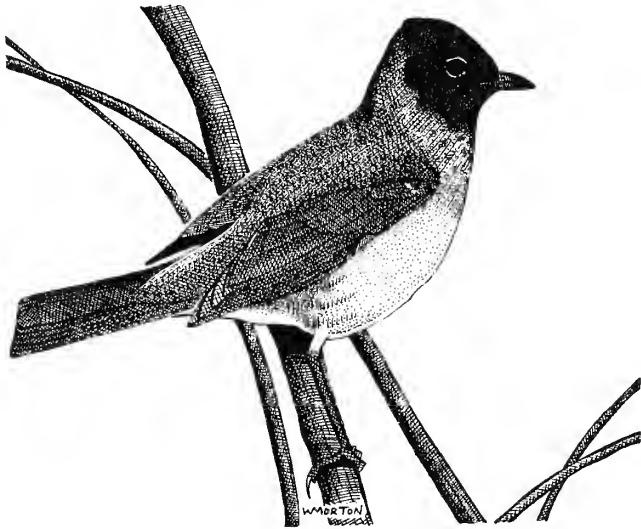


Fig 10 Yellow-vented bulbul *Pycnonotus xanthopygos*. A pair raised two young inside an occupied house at Salalah (UA11), Dhofar, June 1992 (Oman Bird Record).

although its species accounts do include some notes on identification and the second author's startling photographs provide excellent assistance to the ends of identification - especially for some species poorly covered in 'west palearctic' guides. It is a thorough review of all the information to hand on birds and birding in Bahrain. It is readable and oozes the authority of authors who have both lived on the island for many years. The introductory chapters cover the necessary subjects of climate, vegetation well and proceed to describe each part of the main island of Bahrain and its numerous other satellite islands, as well as some famous Bahrain ornithologists of the past and some more recent ones. The chapters devoted to birds cover migration, the best birding sites to be found on the island and the birds which occur there in each month. There is a separate chapter on breeding birds, a systematic list of status and distribution of all and a good bibliography and indexes. Bahrain breeding birds are numbered at 34 and include swallow, which has not been properly substantiated and brown-necked raven which is now extinct. In addition there are three recent arrivals, grey francolin, common mynah and Indian silverbill. The accounts of breeding birds are extremely interesting and give a history of breeding occurrences, information on nest sites, breeding season, clutch size, incubation period and

other breeding biology details. Unfortunately it is not always clear which nesting details relate to actual observations of breeding in Bahrain. The authors also consider additional breeding species that may soon be found, for example Namaqua dove, water rail and palm dove. The systematic list covers 294 species (excluding introductions and escapes) and provides a documented history for each starting with records in 1965. Each species account includes a short note on world distribution as well as describing status in Bahrain and nearby in the Gulf, reviewing records if rare or summarising if more regular. There are a few notes on the habitats, habits and identification of each bird. Rejected species are given separate appendices as are a very useful list of those birds currently in captivity or free flying captive birds on the island. This book is indispensable to anyone birding on or visiting Bahrain and is recommended to all with a wider interest in Arabian birds.

Hardback, 284 pages (landscape 275 x 235 mm), price £45. Published by Immel, 20 Berkeley Street, Berkeley Square, London W1X 5AE. ISBN 0907151-79-5.

## BIRDS OF SOUTHERN ARABIA

by Dave Robinson and Adrian Chapman, 1992

Arabian environment books are coming thick and fast these days. This one fits into the category of lots of pictures and a narrative arranged under main habitats. It is extraordinarily mistitled. This book is about the birds of the UAE and neighbouring states, the southern Gulf - not Southern Arabia! One glance at an Arabian map will confirm that the Emirates, in terms of its general position in the peninsula, is actually further north than south. Southern Arabia is 1000 kms away from the UAE and has a totally different avifauna. It should have been titled 'Birds of the Southern Arabian Gulf' and certainly early publicity for this book used that title. One of the authors has confirmed that the title as published was a shock to him so the fault apparently lies with the publishers. A most peculiar intervention. The map in the book suggests that the coverage is a loop of territory from the Qatar peninsula to Musandam. The book aims to help people put a name to birds in the UAE area and does this through 125 full colour photos, most of which are very attractive and several are of uncommonly photographed species. A few have unfortunately not survived enlargement! The book has a very short introduction, one page, and then describes the birds of the Emirates through a series of essays on the various habitats. The narrative account is written in a very personal style, often anecdotal experience of local birding. The free flow of the narrative describes habitats, particular bird sites and the birds to be found in them, dealing loosely, as appropriate, with identification, description, habits and habitats. Approximately half of the birds occurring in the UAE are mentioned at one time or another or are photographed. The habitat types covered include; islands and headlands, seashore and shoals, mangroves and lagoons, parks and gardens, cultivations, the desert, and mountains and wadis. At the end there is a checklist of birds which appears to be a UAE checklist, and includes the scientific name and serves as an index. There is a short bibliography and a useful list of Gulf Natural History Groups.

*Laminated card cover, 104 pages (271 x 201 mm), price £12.95. Published by Motivate Publishing, PO Box 2331, Dubai, UAE with the support and encouragement of Exxon Corporation. ISBN 1-873544-37-5.*

### **THE VULTURES OF AFRICA**

by P Mundy, D Butchart, J Ledger and S Piper, 1992

This book is an attractive and authoritative account of the eleven vulture species that occur in Africa. Five occur regularly in Arabia (four as breeding birds) and a sixth, Ruppells griffon, may have occurred once and might conceivably still occur from time to time. It is therefore extremely relevant to a very interesting, much maligned and threatened, group of Arabian birds. A global survey of vultures sets the scene with the numbers and variety of species occurring in each part of the world. There follows chapters on the physical characteristics of vultures which set them apart from other birds, their genesis and evolution. The chapter on 'Africa as a setting for vultures', concerns information on basic topography, climate and such subjects as mammal communities (especially the ungulates on which vultures mainly feed). The species accounts make up just over a third of the book. Each account has an introduction which covers nomenclature and systematics in a very readable text, providing interesting historical insights to each bird. Other data is presented under the headings of identification, distribution and habits, behaviour, food and feeding, breeding and conservation status. For each species there is a map of distribution in Africa, a colour plate (artwork) and several line drawings. Following the species accounts, later chapters deal across all species. 'Foraging, feeding and socialising' covers how vultures find food, deal with it and interact with one another at carcasses. 'Comparative aspects of breeding' is self explanatory. 'Worlds in collision' and 'Vultures in modern Africa' concern man and vultures in history and some problems vultures have to contend with now, including major threats from high tension cables and poisoning. There is an especially interesting chapter on the history of the study of vultures in Africa and the *Vulture Study Group* who are responsible for the concept and much of the work of the book. The text is fully supported by a section of 47 data tables, glossary, indexes and bibliography. Extremely well illustrated throughout, with a mixture of colour plates, both artwork and photographs, and line drawings of birds, diagrams etc. The many colour photographs of vultures in all aspects of their lives are especially attractive, well reproduced and with good captions. There is also a number of artwork reproductions featuring vultures in the history of Africa, which give the whole book a well rounded, complete feel. Very readable and highly recommended.

*Hardback, 460 pages (290mm x 220mm), price £55.00. Published by Academic Press, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 24-28 Oval Road, London NW1 7DX. ISBN 0-12-510585-1.*

### **MARINE ECOLOGY OF THE ARABIAN REGION**

by C Sheppard, A Price and C Roberts, 1992

This book is mainly about shallow benthic habitats (rather than pelagic ones), in the Red Sea, Arabian Gulf and the Arabian Sea. The region lies at the very edge of the world's largest ecological system, the tropical Indo-Pacific ocean.

Some of the groups of organisms inhabiting the region are extremely diverse and for many of them the Red Sea is probably the richest marine area west of Indonesia. The various bodies of water around Arabia differ greatly from each other and the marine climate in the region is extreme on account of enclosed basins, high aridity and considerable seasonal changes of air and water temperatures. This scholarly work is compiled by three authors with an extremely wide, first-hand knowledge of the Arabian marine environment. It aims to collate current knowledge on the area from all sources, often using obscure and unpublished material; to review marine systems and processes in the intertidal and shallow sublittoral parts of these seas, and to examine human use of marine resources and the environmental consequences. The region is unique in that it includes some of the poorest and some of the richest nations in the world, each having different requirements and priorities in exploiting and preserving Arabian marine resources. The book is divided into four sections: 'Origins and the Marine climate', covers the basic geography, geology, ocean currents, air and water temperatures; 'Marine Ecosystems' has eight subject chapters; 'Synthesis' looks in detail at the geographical distributions of species within the region in comparison with other regions and 'Use and Management' investigates fisheries, environmental pressures and coastal zone management. The main subject divisions under the Marine Ecosystems section are; reefs and coral communities, coral reef fish assemblages, seaweeds, seagrasses, mangal ecosystems, marshes and sabkhas and the pelagic system. The text is enhanced by dozens of maps, tables, graphs and diagrams. There are a very few black and white photos and a rich list of references and a subject index. It includes very few direct references to birds but there is much that relates to their habitats, distribution and biology. A very useful technical reference source.

*Hardback, 359 pages (250mm x 170mm), price £29.95. Published by Academic Press 24-28 Oval Road, London NW1 7DX. ISBN 0-12-639490-3.*

### **BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY ASSESSMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF YEMEN**

by D M Varisco, J P Ross and A Milroy, 1992

This report mainly concerns that part of the Republic of Yemen which was the former Yemen Arab Republic or North Yemen. However, some notes from the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen or South Yemen are included as appropriate. The purpose of the report is to describe the state of Yemen's natural flora and fauna, identify unique and endangered species and habitats and develop a strategy for the conservation of the country's biological resources, within its overall development policy. Chapters concern biological resources, environmental policy, environmental education and awareness, impact of development on biological resources and conservation priorities for biodiversity. The main conclusion of the study is that biological diversity in Yemen is being drastically reduced by degradation of the environment through cutting of trees and forests for fuel wood; widespread lowering of water tables, massive erosion of the highland terrace ecosystem and infrastructure development including roads and coastal construction.

*Comb bound A4 report, 129 pages. Price £5 (including post and packaging). Published as ICBP as Study Report No 52; available from Birdlife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, England.*

## GULF LANDSCAPES

by Elizabeth Collas and Andrew Taylor, 1992

Gulf landscapes is an attractive pictorial introduction to the southern Gulf region of the Emirates and adjacent regions of Oman. It presents about 100 good quality photographs illustrating the desert, coasts, mountains, weather and the environment of the region. Only a few of the photo subjects are of wildlife. Other sections deal with

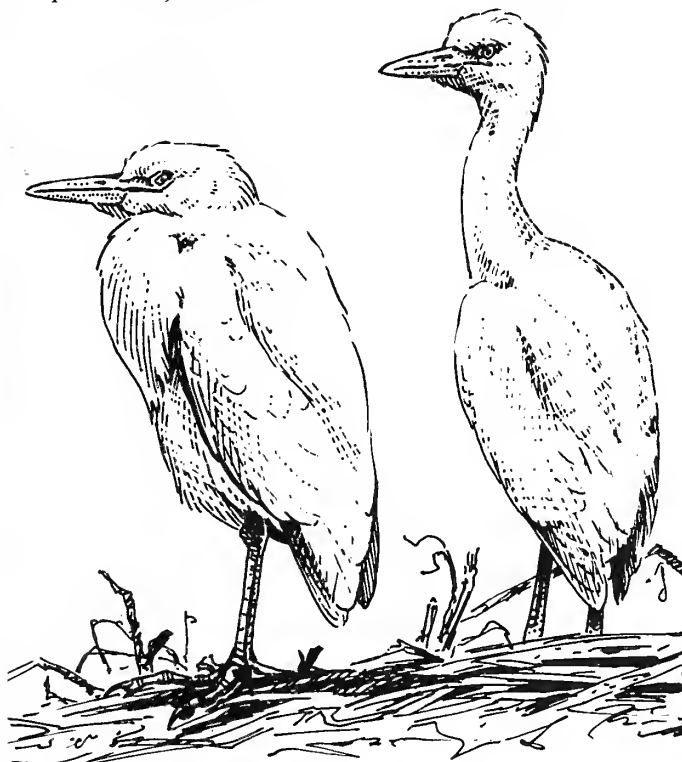


Fig 11 A huge nesting colony of between 1,200 and 1,500 pairs of cattle egrets *Bubulcus ibis* was situated in a group of road-side bushes at Tuwal (IB10) extreme south west Saudi Arabia; with eggs and young, on 31 December 1992 (MCJ and A Suhaibani).

the indigenous commerce of the area, such as fishing and farming, as well as examples of modern day trade and of course the oil industry. The concept of a landscape is given a wide interpretation and includes some amazing pictures to illustrate the greening of the UAE through irrigation, including immaculate golf courses, parks and gardens. This book would make an ideal introduction to a newcomer to the Gulf region or a present for the folks back home.

*Card covers, 103 pages (273 x 200 mm), price about £13.00. Published by Motivate Publishing, PO Box 2331, Dubai, UAE. ISBN 1-873544-34-0.*

## MAMMALS IN THE PALAEARCTIC DESERT: STATUS AND TRENDS IN THE SAHARA-GOBIAN REGION

by J A McNeely and V M Neronov (Editors), 1991

This is a collection of the 20 papers read at a symposium on 'the conservation of rare and endangered mammal species by the Biosphere Reserves network in the Sahara-Gobian desert region', which was within the framework of the 5th International Theriological Congress, held in Rome, 22-29

August 1989. The papers are divided into two parts, the first part dealing with issues relevant to the region as a whole (eight papers); the second deals with species or national problems. The most important paper in the first part is a review of the current status of protected areas in each country of the region and of locally threatened mammals. Other papers in Part 1 deal with endangered breeds of domestic mammals, the implications of climatic change on the distribution of desert mammals and the extinct mammal fauna of north Africa. In Part 2, which includes case studies of endangered mammals as well as national reports, papers relevant to the Arabian region concern the importances of mountain refuges in southern Arabia for the conservation of mammals, the conservation of the Arabian Tahr and the reintroduction of the Arabian Oryx in Oman. There are numerous graphs, tables, maps and diagrams illustrating all the papers. This publication has been sponsored by UNESCO, the International Union of Biological Science, IUCN and WWF.

*Card covers 302 pages (260 x 170 mm), price not known. Published by and available from the Russian Committee for the UNESCO Programme on Man and the Biosphere, (Russian MAB Committee), Fersman Street 13, 117312 Moscow, Russia.*

## HANDBOOK TO MIDDLE EAST AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

by A E Leviton, S C Anderson, K Adler and S A Minton, 1992

This is a checklist, key and identification guide to about 150 species and subspecies of reptiles and amphibians. However the title is a little misleading 'the Middle East' is defined as south west Iran, Iraq, north eastern Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states but not Oman. In the introduction it is explained that the book had its origins in the need for a reptile identification guide by Allied Forces in the 1990/91 Gulf War. The geographical coverage of the book roughly equates the area of Allied operations in that war but many species are included which occur in nearby regions and so, in many respects, it is a satisfactory introduction to the herps of the whole Middle East area. The identification chapters are extremely well keyed, right down to sub-species level where appropriate. There are notes on each family and the determination criteria at genus level, whilst the 140 page checklist includes species descriptions. The species accounts include information on range and remarks on other aspects of occurrence, habitat etc, as necessary. A major strength of this work is an extremely thorough and extensive bibliography of 42 pages, covering the herpetology of the Middle East, breaking down to general references, regional references (usually by country) and a technical bibliography. In addition there are separate chapters on venomous snakes, snake venom and snake bites, which was no doubt the main need of Allied forces in the first place. Final chapters deal with the collecting and preserving herpetological specimens. The text is liberally illustrated with line drawings and maps and there is a block of 32 colour plates, with a total of about 220 individual colour photographs, of most of the species covered by the book. There is a single black and white plate. Recommended.

*Hardback, 263 pages, plus plates (255 x 180 mm), price £29.00. Published by the Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles. Available from the Publications Secretary, SSAR, R T*

## New Arabic books

### TAYUR AL EMIRAT

by Colin Richardson 1992

This book is the Arabic version of the *Birds of the United Arab Emirates* (see review *Phoenix* 7: 12). Translated by Sa'ed Mohammed Al-Awadi it incorporates a number of additions and revisions to the original English text, including eight new species, 25 revisions to the breeding maps, changed times of occurrence charts, changed texts (12 species) as well as revised information and maps on bird sites.

Hardback, 180 pages, (230 x 153 mm), price £17 (plus £3 post and package). Published by Hobby Publications, Media Fine Ltd, First Floor, Port of Liverpool Buildings, AL3 1B2 UK. Also available from Colin Richardson, PO Box 50394, Dubai, UAE. ISBN 1-872839-01-2.

## Journals, Reports & other publications

Most international ornithological publications give periodic listings of recent literature which include papers concerning birds in Arabia. The Ornithological Society of the Middle East publishes in its bulletin a periodic roundup of all ornithological publications for the Middle East area. However, publications of the various natural history and bird groups in Arabia and official conservation organisations do not always get reviewed. The aim of this note is to list some of the more interesting papers concerning birds and other wildlife which have appeared in local natural history newsletters and in other reports etc in Arabia in recent months. Space does not permit the full citation of each article but further information can be obtained from the various societies and organisations shown. Note that in addition to the papers listed regular features such as recent reports, brief notes etc appear in virtually all the newsletters quoted.

### Emirates Bird Report 17 (1993)

At 60 pages and with colour photographs for the first time this issue has increased interest and attractiveness. Articles on white-capped bunting *Emberiza stewarti* and Radde's warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi* both claimed new to Arabia and the occurrence of forest wagtail *Dendronanthus indicus* in UAE and lots more. Available from Colin Richardson, Emirates Bird Group, PO Box 50394, Dubai, UAE.

### The Fauna of Saudi Arabia Vol 13 (1993)

The latest volume of this important journal contains 17 papers, comprising nine on insects, three on other invertebrates, two on reptiles, one on birds and two on mammals. The invertebrates paper includes a checklist of Arabian dragonflies. By far the most important paper in this issue is a complete review of the turtles of Arabia. This

paper (197 pages) examines in detail the status and distribution of the ten species of turtles, terrapins and tortoises that occur or have occurred in the Arabian region. It will be the last word on this group for many years. The single paper on birds concerns the migration of coastal waders on Bahrain, based on a study of 22 species on tidal mud flats over an 11 month period.

*The Fauna of Saudi Arabia* is edited by Professor W Buttiker and Doctor F Krupp. Volume 13 comprises 400 pages (288 x 210 mm) and is published by the NCWCD Riyadh. Available from Pro-entomologia, Natural History Museum, Augustinerstrasse 2, CH 4001, Basel, Switzerland (ISBN 3-72340013-2).

### Oman Bird News

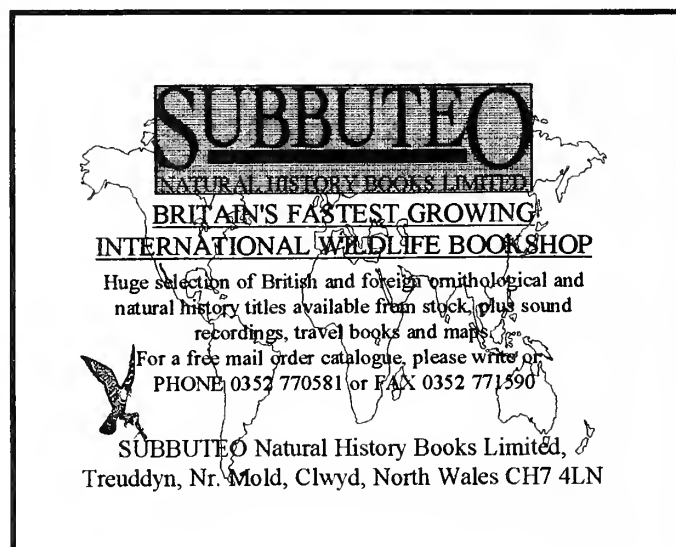
No 13 (Winter 92/93) contains a thorough note on the ecology of bee-eaters in Oman. No 14 (Summer 1993) includes articles on the Kuria Muria Islands and the diet of Jouanin's petrel. Available from Oman Bird Group, c/o Natural History Museum, PO Box 668, Muscat, Oman.

### Tribulus

The October 1992 issue (Vol 2:2) has articles on harriers in Arabia, Socotra cormorants breeding in UAE and wildlife and conservation in eastern Yemen. The most recent issue, (Vol 3:1; April 1993) contains a summary report of ABBA Survey 13 to the UAE and Oman. Available from the Emirates Natural History Group, PO Box 2380, Abu Dhabi, UAE.

### Asian and Australasian Waterfowl Census 1992

The mid-winter (January 1992) census of Asian and Australasian waterfowl, report includes data on counts in nine states of south west Asia. For Arabia these were (number of sites and total birds recorded shown in brackets) Bahrain (21:47,098), Oman (13:326,425), Qatar (8:2,992), Saudi Arabia (31:167,677), UAE (13:50,351) and Yemen (8:2,007). The records included about 115 waterfrequenting species from Arabia. Published by the International Waterfowl and Wetland Research Bureau and the Asian Wetland Bureau. Available from IWRB, Slimbridge, Gloucester GL2 7BX, UK. Price £6 including post and package.



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## Sandgrouse

The most recent volume available (Vol 14; Part 1, 1992) contains a wide range of important articles, including: the lappet-faced vulture in western Saudi Arabia, crab plovers breeding in Abu Dhabi, notes on house crow control in Aden, pallid swifts breeding in Qatar and Dead Sea sparrows in Arabia.

## OSME Bulletin

In No 29 (Autumn 1992) there are six main articles, including a review of ornithological research at the National Wildlife Research Centre at Taif, Saudi Arabia, breeding herons in the Nile Valley and delta and a note on kestrels feeding on reptiles. No 30 (Spring 1993) has notes on the OSME Survey of eastern Yemen and the diet of eagle owl in northern Arabia. No 31 (Autumn 1993) has further notes on the 1993 OSME Survey of Yemen, a description of the nest of the golden-winged grosbeak and the crop contents of a spotted sandgrouse. *Sandgrouse and the OSME Bulletin* are available from OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL, England.

## Zoology in the Middle East Vol 7 (1992)

Comprised of nine papers, five on vertebrates two of which concern birds. These are a paper on breeding white pelicans at a new site in central Anatolia, Turkey (in German with English summary) and the migration of the great snipe through Turkey. Available from Max Kasperek, Verlag, Bleichstrasse 1, 6900 Heidelberg, Germany. Price 27DM. ISBN 3.925064-14-1, ISSN 0939-7140.

## Journal of the Saudi Arabian Natural History Society Vol 3 No 2 (Autumn 1991)

Perhaps this issue should have been dated Autumn 1992 as it was not received until December 1992. Contains five main articles, including one on the effect of the Kuwait war oil spill in the Arabian Gulf and another on the changing avifauna of Saudi Arabia, brought about mainly by the increase in agriculture and irrigation in the last two decades. Available from SANHS, c/o The Bursar, The Continental School, PO Box 6453, Jeddah 21442, Saudi Arabia.

## More about mountain nightjar

Arthur Stagg in *Phoenix* 9:5, recorded the first occurrence of the mountain nightjar *Caprimulgus poliocephalus* in the south west Saudi Arabian highlands. Other records are now available, including of mist-netted birds, confirming their identity. Identification had remained uncertain because, according to Jackson (in a paper in preparation), there are indications that in Africa the song generally attributed to mountain nightjar might actually belong to dusky nightjar *C. fraenatus*, and that the song of the mountain nightjar resembles the song of the Ruwenzori nightjar *C. ruwenzorii*. Peter Symens heard the species on several occasions in the vicinity of Raydah Escarpment (IA13) and managed to see one clearly for the first time in April 1989, but the mystery could not be solved until one could be examined in the hand. Dr Steven Newton finally managed to trap a bird with mistnets at dusk on 20 May 1992, and the identification of the Arabian birds could then be confirmed as mountain nightjar. Meanwhile, good quality sound recordings were made by Dr Hans Winkler at the same locality in March 1992. A full description of the trapped bird and analysis of the sound recordings are to be published separately.

Over the years, singing mountain nightjars have been recorded at the Raydah Escarpment in every month of the year, indicating that they are resident. Although no nest has been found, an increase in singing activity and territorial behaviour has been noticed in March-May, indicating this period is most probably the main breeding season. At Raydah the nightjars are found along steep slopes covered with dense juniper forest, with numerous rocky outcrops. During spring and summer it is found at altitudes of 2000 to 3000 m, but during the colder winter months it is generally recorded slightly lower, between 1200 and 1900 m. In April 1990 at least ten singing birds were found there and in 1992 this number had increased to 16. Hans Winkler and Steven Newton also found birds singing on Jebel

Ibrahim (HA17) on 28-30 March 1992 and in August 1992. Peter Symens found birds singing near al Shafa (GA19) near Taif, and at two localities near al Baha (HA17). All these new sites consist of steep rocky slopes, but with much lower vegetation cover. Based on our observations, we believe that the mountain nightjar is fairly widespread and locally common along the western edges of the Asir mountains in Saudi Arabia and its discovery further south along the Yemeni mountains is probably only a matter of time.

In Africa, the mountain nightjar has a patchy distribution in the highlands, from Ethiopia in the north to Malawi in the south and Zaire in the west. An isolated population occurs in Angola. It occurs in a range of highland habitats, from forest edges and other wooded habitats, including suburban gardens, to more open rocky habitats, (Fry et al. 1988, *The Birds of Africa* Vol III). In Kenya it occurs at altitudes from 1000 to 3000 m and is apparently resident, although at the highest altitudes it is known as a partially migrant (Lewis & Pomeroy 1989, *A Bird Atlas of Kenya*). Our observations from Saudi Arabia fit very well within this pattern.

In view of the geographical isolation of this strictly resident species, and some differences from African birds in sonograms and plumage, this recently discovered population of mountain nightjars in Arabia most probably represents a new sub-species, endemic to the mountains of south west Arabia.

P Symens, Wildlife Sanctuary for the Gulf Region, PO Box 11071, Jubail 31961, Saudi Arabia.

Dr S Newton, National Wildlife Research Center, PO Box 1086, Taif, Saudi Arabia.

A Stagg, Apartado 157, Sa Pobla, Mallorca 07420, Spain.

Dr H Winkler, KLI-Vergl. Verhaltensforschung, Savoyenstrasse 1a, A-1160 Vienna, Austria.



# Greater flamingos breed in the United Arab Emirates in 1993

Greater flamingos *Phoenicopterus ruber* can be seen in the UAE in all months of the year. Numbers are generally highest in the winter period, when many birds probably from Iranian breeding sites are present, but oversummering flocks in recent years has led to speculation that they may breed. Following the observation of breeding behaviour in Khor Dubai in 1984, an artificial island was specifically constructed in 1985 to encourage breeding. A number of partially finished nest mounds were then made by some birds but they were flooded before completion and subsequent attempts were no more successful, (*Phoenix* 2:2; 3:6).

On 7 June 1993 SJA and EH visited al Ghar lakes (UB25) near Mafraq, about 40 km south east of Abu Dhabi city to count waterfowl. At a point only a few hundred metres from the main road SJA noticed a number of flamingos apparently incubating on well constructed nest mounds. Knowing they had not been confirmed to breed in the UAE, the birds were observed from a distance in an attempt to discover the nest contents for example when birds stood up. A single egg, (the normal clutch size), was visible in at least three of the nests and in two of these an adult was seen using its' bill to turn the egg. This is the first breeding of greater flamingo in Arabia since 1922 when they bred on Bubiyan island, Kuwait (Ticehurst, 1926; *J Bombay Nat Hist Soc* 31:725-733) and the first for the Arabian mainland. Some of the other mounds may also have contained an egg. Copulation was observed and it was suspected that a few females were yet to lay. More eggs were seen on subsequent visits.

Following the discovery of the colony, regular counts were made of birds and nest mounds. A maximum of 571 full-grown birds were counted on 10 June and on various later dates 15 to 22 of the mounds held incubating birds. Four hatched chicks were seen in nest mounds on 6 July, and with all the remaining eggs due to hatch over the next few days success seemed assured. However, on 9 July EH visited the site with Rob Quested and found the colony deserted. A single set of human footprints leading out across the sand told what had happened. Someone has entered the colony on the night of 8 July and removed all but one of the unhatched eggs and probably the recently hatched young too. This was particularly senseless because the young are exceptionally difficult to hand-rear. (This requires a 'milk' produced from the lining of the parents' crop and oesophagus). This intrusion was despite the site being declared a reserve, which became officially protected in 1991, and warnings in the press. A visit to the colony site by members of the Emirates Natural History Group after the robbery, found some 79 partially constructed or completed mounds, one displaced egg and a single dead chick.

Al Ghar is a sabkha flash fed by winter rains and artificially dammed by bunds which allow lorries access across the area. Treated sewage from the nearby Wathba prison is discharged into the lake which is consequently eutrophic.

In recent years the increased height of the bunds has ponded up a greater depth of water which has then persisted through the summer months. Even so the water level fell very low by the end of July 1993 and the deserted colony site was left stranded 75 m from the water's edge. In future years, if the site is to remain suitable long enough for young birds to fledge, water levels will have to be managed by pumping in extra water or by creating an upper reservoir from which water can be released as necessary. It is difficult to say whether or not the rapid departure of all flamingos from al Ghar following the robbery of the colony was simply coincidental and inevitable. Certainly as water levels fell the food biomass would have been much reduced. Before the destruction of the colony there had been speculation that had the lakes dried up too rapidly, the young might well have starved before they fledged. Indeed, for this breeding occurrence to have been successful the water level would probably have needed to have been maintained until at least mid-September, as fledging takes another 65 days from hatching.

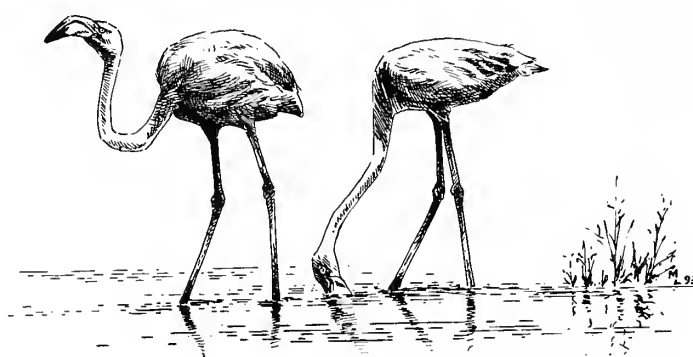


Fig 12 Greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber* bred for the first time on the Arabian mainland in the UAE in Summer 1993, unfortunately the nests were disturbed and probably robbed.

No conclusive study of the food source of the flamingos on al Ghar lake was made. The Centre for Desert and Marine Environment Research of the Emirates University took water samples for analysis and collected invertebrates for possible identification of the food source. It is well known that all of the world's six flamingo species are known to feed on crustacea to some extent. Reports in various local newspapers suggested that it was brine shrimps, or their larvae, that formed the major food item of the flamingos, but only larvae were actually found in al Ghar lake. Dr Reza Khan has since suggested that bloodworms, the larvae of chironomids, which emerge as the more commonly known midge, might form the principal food at al Ghar. These occur very abundantly at al Ghar lake. An algal 'bloom', which covered an extensive area of the bed of the breeding lake, to a depth of 20-40 cm, may also have been consumed.

The chance combination of a water body shallow enough for flamingos to feed in and deep enough to remain throughout the breeding season, together with an abundance of suitable prey, encouraged, or more correctly, fertilised by a nutrient-rich inflow of sewage, created near ideal breeding conditions for them during 1993. Clearly, however, the site needs protection and management. Breeding flamingos are susceptible to many sorts of disturbance and it is imperative that human intrusions are prevented. There is every reason to think the birds will try

again next year. By way of preparation for 1994 and beyond, a management plan needs to be drawn up and agreed upon at the earliest possible opportunity. This would require the expertise of aviculturists, ornithologists, hydrologists and engineers to manipulate and maintain the ideal habitat, together with the support and backing of Municipality officials and other staff to carry out the necessary works and ensure protection of the site.

*S Aspinall and E Hirschfeld, c/o National Avian Research Centre, PO Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, UAE.*

## Short-toed and Bimaculated Larks breed on Karan Island, Arabian Gulf

The winter of 1992/1993 was the wettest winter on record in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. Throughout the region huge amounts of rain triggered an exceptional bloom of spring flowers and many perennials gathered enough reserves to remain green throughout most of the dry season. This effect was noticed on the islands in the northern Gulf where the overall vegetation cover markedly increased. On the 120 ha. island of Karan (PB32) a dense carpet of *Mesembryanthemum nodiflorum*. covered the entire central plain in contrast to 'normal' years when it is found only in loose, fringing patches, leaving the more elevated and silty parts of the plain completely barren.

In June 1993 we returned to Karan to monitor breeding terns for the third successive summer. In previous years, crested larks *Galerida cristata* were the only terrestrial birds breeding on the island. We were surprised when on 15 June we observed a recently fledged lark which was different from the juvenile crested larks, which were also present. In comparison with the crested larks it had a bigger head, heavier bill and longer wings. A broad, whitish supercilium, eyering, well-developed black crescents on the sides of the upper breast and an overall darker streaking on the upper parts gave it a much more pronounced and distinctive plumage. These points, together with the white terminal band to the tail and the dark brownish underwing, allowed us to identify it as a juvenile bimaculated lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata*. The extremely short tail, the remains of down on the crown and the poor flight capacity of the bird indicated that it could not have reached the island from elsewhere and so it must have been hatched on Karan. During the next few days we were able to confirm identification by observing, two fledglings following an adult bimaculated lark at close range. It was interesting that the two fledglings showed a considerable variation in the size of the black crescents on the sides of the upper breast; in one these patches were very well developed while in the other they were nearly absent.

On 18 June we observed another recently fledged juvenile lark which looked much smaller than the crested and bimaculated lark juveniles and differed from them in having a finer bill and clear white edges on the outer tail feathers. It lacked the clear eyering, the dark underwing and the white terminal band on the tail of the bimaculated lark juveniles. We were able to confirm identification as short-toed larks *Calandrella brachydactyla* as, during the next

few days, we regularly saw up to three of these juvenile larks with one, and on some occasions two adults of that species. On 20 June we also flushed an adult from an empty nest which was apparently still under construction. As we approached to about 5 m, the bird rushed off the nest, feigning a broken wing and fluttered away over the ground for some 50 m, after which it flew off and disappeared between *Salsola* bushes. When we checked this nest one week later it was still empty, as it was on several subsequent visits. The nest was a small cup of fine grass stems and roots, located under one of a few isolated *Salsola* bushes on the *Mesembryanthemum* plain.

After 27 June no more adult bimaculated larks were observed while the juveniles were seen daily until 2 July, after which they apparently left the island. The short-toed larks were not found after 5 July.

Both species have an incubation period of 12 to 13 days and a fledgling period of less than two weeks. Assuming that the young birds of both species left the nest during the first week of June, breeding activity must have started in early May. This corresponds well with the literature data for both species. Short-toed larks are known to regularly produce two broods; presumably the birds on Karan also attempted to produce a second brood, but abandoned before the nest was completed, possibly because of the extremely hot and humid weather during that period. Cramp et al, (1988; *Birds of the Western Palearctic* Vol V) mention that many nests are abandoned before completion, especially late in the season.

The bimaculated lark is known as a breeding bird from eastern Turkey to Syria, Lebanon and Israel in the south and through Iraq and Iran to the Aral Sea in the east. In Arabia breeding is only known from one record in Kuwait in 1978. Throughout its breeding range it frequents a wide range of steppe, desert and semi-desert habitats at middle and higher altitudes where it generally replaces calandra lark *Melanocorypha calandra* which breeds at lower altitudes. In this context a breeding record near sea level is rather unusual. However, the rather unique steppe-like *Mesembryanthemum* plain on Karan closely resembles some of the typical breeding habitats known in Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan.

The short-toed lark has a much wider breeding range extending from the Mediterranean region in Europe and North Africa to northern Mongolia and China. In the Middle East it is restricted to the northern parts of the region and in Arabia breeding has been confirmed on only one previous occasion near Riyadh in Saudi Arabia but has been suspected at several other localities. It is a typical steppe bird, favouring a wide range of dry open plains at low and middle altitudes. The habitat on Karan fits well into this range.

Undoubtedly the unusual amount of winter rain and the resulting increase in vegetation cover are the cause of these unusual breeding records of larks on Karan.

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# Breeding season and multiple brooding of some common birds in west central Saudi Arabia

The accounts of ABBA Co-ordinator MC Jennings' atlassing travels, published in the *Journal of the Saudi Arabia Natural History Society*, *Phoenix* and elsewhere, always make interesting and entertaining reading... but sometimes, and perhaps we are not alone in thinking this, expeditions in December and so on seem a little optimistic regarding the collection of useful records of breeding birds. Arabia is apparently little different to NW Europe with regard to the breeding season of large raptors and ravens, which often starts before the end of winter, whereas that of smaller species commences in spring and early summer. In the former case, the co-incidence of breeding season has probably arisen for different reasons: for example, lappet-faced vultures *Torgos tracheliotus* in Saudi Arabia incubate during December and January when temperatures in the central plains are at their lowest, but it is unlikely that Scottish golden eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* and northern ravens *Corvus corax* choose late winter to prevent their eggs overheating! However, many arid-land birds are thought to be fairly nomadic, with breeding occurring when and where conditions are best with respect to vegetation, insect abundance etc, and not necessarily in a predictable season. Species such as black-crowned finch lark *Eremopterix nigriceps* and Dunn's lark *Eremalauda dunni* may be good examples in Arabia and these have been recorded breeding in autumn in the Taif area after good rains in August.

In the following paragraphs we summarise some information collected in the vicinity of the National Wildlife Research Centre (NWRC), Taif (GB19) on the breeding seasons and multibrooding of some common resident species. NWRC, established in 1986, comprises a fenced area of approximately 600 ha. at 1450 m. altitude, in a transition zone from semi-desert plains to fairly arid foothills on the inland side of the Asir-Hedjaz mountains. Vegetation in the area is recovering from the heavy overgrazing prevalent before enclosure and is currently shrubby grassland with some mature acacia trees.

## Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

In spring 1992 we observed hoopoes using an old nest box situated at about 2.5 m height on the trunk of an acacia tree. A clutch of five was partially hatched on 3 April, later four chicks were ringed (20 April) and these were presumed to have fledged. Paz (1987: *The Birds of Israel*) states that courtship sometimes commences at the end of February but more usually at the end of March-early April; the clutch is usually 5-6 and on some occasions they may be double-brooded - thus far, nothing unusual in the Taif observations. However, in 1993 a clutch of seven was laid in the same box in late January and these hatched mid-February. (Brood size was not determined and fledging success could not be monitored). The box was not revisited until early May at which time the box contained three chicks (two of which were dead) and two infertile eggs; the clutch had probably been laid in mid-April. Unfortunately, the last chick had died by late May (possible due to heavy

infestation of the tree and box with ants). In early June, the male at the site was observed feeding the female which was incubating another clutch of five eggs. Four chicks hatched in mid-June but only one was alive at the end of the month and this too was dead on 19 July.

Whilst the latter nest attempts were being monitored, a second pair of hoopoes was discovered in a second nest box only about 150 m from the first. A clutch of five was hatching on 1 May and the five chicks were healthy on 23 May; when we visited the box on 4 June only four chicks remained in the nest and the fifth had fledged earlier and was accompanying the adults. On 2 July another clutch of five was present in the box (we estimate this was laid in late June) and subsequently three hatched and two fledged in mid-August.

These observations are summarised in the following table. Although we cannot be certain of the identities of all adults (some were ringed, some were not) between the various nest attempts at each box, we are reasonably certain that only two pairs were involved. The first box was certainly triple-brooded and the second double-brooded and, given the approximate synchronisation of the last two attempts of both pairs, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the second pair also produced a first brood in February/March.

	Nest Box 1		Nest Box 2	Total	Sample	
	1992	1993	1993	No	Mean	Size
Clutch	5	7 5 5	5 5	32	5.3	6
Hatch	4	- 3 4	5 3	19	3.8	5
Fledge	4	- 0 0	5 2	11	2.2	5

In summary these few observations from an exceedingly hot and arid country reveal a prolonged laying season from late January to late June, double-broods the minimum norm, hatching success 76%, fledging success 44%, mean clutch 5.3, mean (minimum) brood at hatch 3.8 and mean (minimum) brood at fledging 2.2.

## African collared dove *Streptopelia roseogrisea*

This species is largely a breeding migrant in western Saudi Arabia. Observations at NWRC in 1992 commenced in early April. The nest, a very small flimsy structure in the heart of a dense acacia tree, was disturbed as little as possible to prevent the eggs from being knocked out. Thus, we did not observe the first clutch and brood closely, but it was being incubated on 5 April and two chicks were present on 20 April; the second clutch was being incubated on 17 May and two large squabs were present on 26 May through 2 June and these fledged about 5 June. A third clutch (two eggs) was present by 10 June, with recently hatched chicks on 23 June. Two large chicks were in the nest on 7 July and these had 'walked out' of the nest but were close by on 10 July and could certainly fly by 11 July. Thus this species is certainly triple-brooded at NWRC.

## Pale crag martin *Ptyonoprogne fuligula*

A pair of adults was feeding three recently fledged young around the office buildings of NWRC on 22 January 1993. This early start to the season is not exceptional as two

weeks earlier a bird was incubating a clutch of four in a cave nest in Wadi Turabah, about 100 km to the south of NWRC.

#### **Yellow-vented bulbul** *Pycnonotus xanthopygos*

The earliest fledged brood (of three or four) was seen on 8 February 1993. No other breeding observations were made until late May, primarily due to frequent periods of absence from the NWRC, but at two sites one pair was nest building on 26 May and a second was very agitated by the presence of a group of Arabian babblers *Turdoides squamiceps* around their nest bush, 27 May. The latter was not inspected, but three very recently fledged young were with the pair on 16 June and the family group remained together until at least 26 June. A further nest history at about this time was an incubating adult with a clutch of three on 10 June, from which all three young were fledged by 24 June. Finally, a very recently fledged single juvenile with a pair was present 15-25 July. The breeding season thus extends from mid-late January through to late June/early July; at least three broods could be produced in this time span. Paz (1987) states that the breeding season in Israel could commence mid-March, but peaks in May/June, with triple-brooding frequent.

#### **Arabian babbler** *Turdoides squamiceps*

We have not followed nest histories of this species in detail, but our observations from 1993 demonstrate another instance of a prolonged breeding season. The first fledgling was seen on 3 January indicating nest initiation in mid-December or earlier. On the same day, nest building was seen elsewhere and between 11 January and 14 February feeding of nestlings or fledglings was seen in at least two (but probably three) other territories. No further observations were made until July, but again this was due to less effort on our behalf rather than lack of activity by the babblers. Two of the above territories had fledged more young on 11 July (five) and 5 August (one) with another on 20 July (two). The Israeli breeding season usually spans February to July though can occur at other times such as after the moult in October.

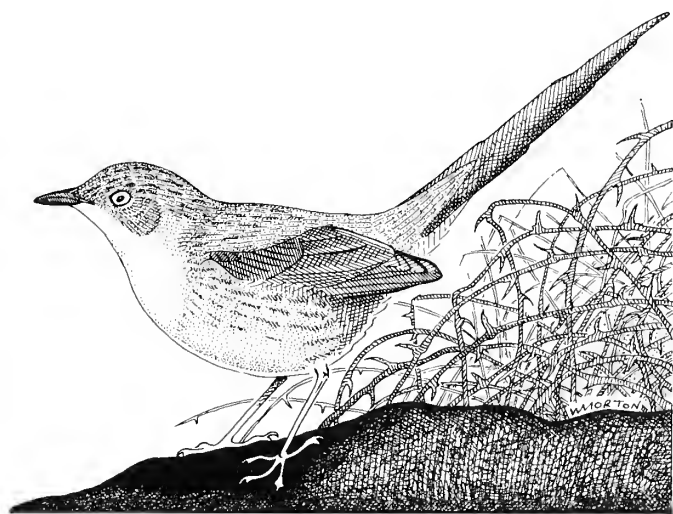


Fig 13 Some years when conditions are favourable the Arabian babbler *Turdoides squamiceps* is multi-brooded with an extended breeding season from December to August.

#### **Great grey shrike** *Lanius excubitor*

In 1993 we made observations at three territories. At the first an adult was suspected of feeding nestlings on 22 January and this was confirmed by the appearance of two fledglings on 8 February. Another brood was suspected between 31 May and June when once again the adult appeared to be flying around in the area with food for a brood. The second territory also indicated two broods. Fledglings (three) were first seen on 7 February and these were still associating with (and being fed by) the adults on 16 March. The second brood (two) fledged on 29 May and these had apparently left the territory by 7 June. Our observations were most complete at a third territory where the first brood was fledged on 3 March, the two fledglings were still present close to the nest on 16 March. The second brood of three (new nest, same acacia bush) were just over a week old on 11 May and these probably fledged just before 23 May. The fledglings were colour-ringed and the last one dispersed away from the natal territory between 30-31 May, by which time the adults were absent too. Two days later two unringed juveniles appeared in the territory and one or other was still present until 4 August. It is conceivable that these were the first brood juveniles that reoccupied their vacated natal territory when their parents initiated a third brood about 150 m away from the site. The latter brood of three fledged just before 7 July at which time the adults had commenced moult. The family party was seen until 22 July and subsequently only one unringed fledgling was seen, on 4 August. In the Negev Desert (Degen et al. 1992; *Ecology* 73: 2273-2283), nesting and incubation commence February/March with double-brooding the rule, although up to 4 broods have been recorded.

#### **Conclusions**

For three species resident in the Taif area we report prolonged breeding seasons the Arabian babbler from mid-December to early August, with probably a minimum of 3 broods produced in this period in good territories. Yellow-vented bulbuls also made an early start about mid-January and still had dependent young in late July. Again, triple-brooding is suspected. For the great grey shrike, we report a start in early January with a definite third brood fledged in early July. The pale crag martin must also start breeding in late December but we have not noted the extent of its breeding season. All four species appear to start breeding much earlier than in Israel, no doubt due to the benign weather in west central Saudi Arabia in December and January. We also document triple-brooding in the African collared dove but, as this species is probably migratory, its nesting season in the highlands does not begin until March, though eggs had been laid on Red Sea islands by 21 February.

We hope this article stimulates observers elsewhere in Arabia to take more note of breeding seasons and multiple brooding in the common and less glamorous species. Atlassing in mid-winter can be a productive activity after all!

S & A Newton, NWRC, PO Box 1086, Taif, Saudi Arabia.

# Summary of the OSME survey of southern and eastern Yemen and Socotra: spring 1993

Over an eight week period from March to May 1993 OSME conducted an extensive survey of the birds, habitats and conservation in the southern and eastern governorates of the Republic of Yemen. A week of the period was spent on the island of Socotra (previewed in *Phoenix* 9: 26-27).

Ornithological studies were conducted at 77 sites, and concentrated on four main integrated projects;

(i) specific species studies on the 13 south west Arabian and five Socotra bird species of global conservation significance (several of which are considered threatened), together with the locally threatened Arabian bustard *Ardeotis arabs* population;

(ii) gathering data for the identification of potential Important Bird Areas (IBAs);

(iii) standardised habitat and bird community censusing, involving the systematic surveying of over 410 km of representative habitats, coupled with over 21 hours of spot-count observations, to assess differences between bird communities in different habitats and evaluate the conservation importance of each;

(iv) collecting data for the forthcoming Atlas of Breeding Birds of Arabia (ABBA), covering 64 half-degree squares. In addition mist-netting was carried out for in-the-hand study of some of the region's poorly known birds, and the distribution was documented of amphibian, reptile and mammal species.

Four bird species previously unrecorded in Yemen were discovered, as well as 10 new to Socotra. The first probable breeding record of malachite kingfisher *Alcedo cristata* in Arabia was made at Wadi Hajar (OB05). (See separate article by Guy Kirwan in this issue). Range extensions were recorded for at least two south west Arabian endemics, Arabian serin *Serinus rothschildi* and Arabian waxbill *Estrilda rufibarba*. Arabian partridge *Alectoris melanocephala* was found down to sea level as was golden-winged grosbeak *Rhynchostruthus socotranus*. Dunn's lark *Eremalauda dunni* was discovered in desert-steppe on the southern fringe of the Rub-al-Khali (Empty Quarter) between the Hadramaut and Ma'rib.

Eleven additional potential IBAs were identified in Yemen, which included the vast gravel plain along the coast west of Aden, which supports mature acacia savanna, where the continued presence of Arabian bustard was confirmed (one record). This area may still hold a nationally important population of the species. One of the largest remaining tracts of juniper forest in Yemen, discovered on Jabal Iraf on the old North/South Yemen border north of Aden, supported populations of Arabian woodpecker *Dendrocopos dora*, Arabian waxbill and golden-winged grosbeak, as well as plain nightjar *Caprimulgus inornatus* (of which there are only very few previous records from Yemen). In the Mahra region of eastern Yemen there is a substantial zone of drought deciduous woodland, covering many square kilometres (an extension of the Dhofar region in Oman),

which probably supports the highest breeding density of golden-winged grosbeak in Yemen, together with spotted eagle owl *Bubo africanus* and breeding didric cuckoo *Chrysococcyx caprius*. A largely unvegetated desert plain c40 km west of al-Ghayda, (ca.QB09) held a small population of lappet-faced vultures *Torgos tracheliotus*. Internationally important numbers of crab plovers *Dromas ardeola* (170) were found on the Dhubab Flats, on the Red Sea coast north of Bab al-Mandab, along with large numbers of migratory waders. Other notable finds involving migratory species included substantial passage of rufous bush robin *Cercotrichas galactotes* and barred warbler *Sylvia nisoria*. In contrast was the complete absence of Abyssinian roller *Coracias abyssinicus*, a rains-migrant from sub-Saharan Africa.

On Socotra, sites on the lowland coastal plain, through the mid-altitude zone and up to montane habitats of about 1,100 m, were surveyed. The island's four endemic bird species were all found, three in good numbers: Socotra sunbird *Nectarinia balfouri* (very common), Socotra warbler *Cisticola incana* (relatively common in suitable habitats) and Socotra grackle *Onycognathus frater* (also relatively common in suitable habitats). Somewhat surprisingly perhaps, only one Socotra bunting *Emberiza socotrana* was discovered, in rocky terrain at about 400 m. In contrast its congener the cinnamon-breasted rock bunting *Emberiza tahapisi* was encountered frequently in many habitats. Several sites merited IBA status, in particular Wadi Ayhaft, a well vegetated wadi on the north coast. The Socotra race of rufous sparrow *Passer motitensis insularis* (considered by some to be a separate species) is abundant. Forbe-Watson's swift *Apus berliozi* is a fairly common mid-high altitude species. One individual was mist-netted.

Two pelagic trips were made, one off the north coast of Socotra, the other out of Sayhut on the southern coast of



Fig 14 The little-known Socotra sunbird *Nectarinia balfouri* was found to be common and widespread in a variety of habitats on Socotra by the OSME survey in 1993.



Yemen, east of Mukalla. Jouanin's petrel *Bulweria fallax* was recorded in good numbers (250+ seen on each survey). Other notable seabird observations included small numbers of wedge-tailed shearwaters *Puffinus pacificus* off the south coast of Yemen, pairs of red-billed tropicbirds *Phaethon aethereus* at two localities on the south coast of Yemen, and the importance of the Mahra coast as a feeding area for Audubon's shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri*.

The expedition culminated with a presentation of the results to the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and representatives of the Agricultural Research and Extension Authority and the Environmental Protection Council, during which priority areas for bird species and habitat conservation were discussed, and follow-up action was agreed upon.

P Davidson, 24 Smithfield Road, Norwich NR1 2HN, UK.

## Society News

**Bahrain Natural History Society.** - The new bird recorder is Howard King, PO Box 11802, Survey Director, Ministry of Housing, Manama, Bahrain. (Telephone 742 739). Howard would be very interested to make contact with anyone birding on Bahrain or planning a visit there.

**Yemen Ornithological Society** - This group has become active once again under the leadership/inspiration of Derek Harvey. It now regularly produces a newsletter, has organised bird counts, assisted the OSME survey of 1993 and is much involved with fostering an interest in birds in the local community and schools. Details from Derek Harvey, c/o Chevron International (Yemen) Ltd, Chevron Companies, 2 Portman Street, London W1H 0AN.

**The Travelling Naturalists of Al-Khobar** - This is an informal group which has existed since the early 1980's. It aims to bring together people who are interested in the culture, history, heritage and geography of the Arab world in general and the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia in particular. The group holds monthly meetings in Al-Khobar and arranges field trips and other outings from time to time. News of programmes, meetings (past and future) are contained in a monthly newsletter. The newsletter also carries articles on Arabian natural history and the other interests of the group. Annual membership subscription is 45 SR (75 SR for a family) but non-members may attend meetings at an entrance fee of 15 SR. Details of the Society and its newsletter are available from the Secretary, Carlos Maeztu, Travelling Naturalists, ARAMCO Box 5971, Dhahran 31311, Saudi Arabia, (telephone 8787754).

## Announcements

### Next OSME AGM

The next Annual General Meeting of the Ornithological Society of the Middle East will be held on Saturday 9 July 1994 at the Natural History Museum, London. The 1995 AGM will take place on Saturday 15 July 1995. Further details will be announced in the Spring 1994 OSME Bulletin.

### International Raptor Migration Atlas

An international project to establish a register of sites of global significance to migrating raptors is underway. The project known as *Hawks Aloft Worldwide* is seeking to contact individuals and groups who are able to contribute raptor migration site data. For more information and a copy of the project newsletter, write to Dr K L Bildstein, Hawks Aloft Worldwide, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association, RR 2 Box 191, Kempton PA, 19529-9449, USA.

### Riyadh Birding News

The first issue of this newsletter was prepared in September 1993. It aims to keep birders both outside and inside Saudi Arabia, aware of unusual sightings in and around the Riyadh area of central Arabia. Contact Tom Tarrant, PO Box 2737, Riyadh 11461, Saudi Arabia, for more details.

### The African Bird Club

The African Bird Club is a new group which aims to provide a worldwide focus for African ornithology, with particular reference to conservation and research. It covers the whole of Africa including north Africa and overlaps with the ABBA project in a mutual interest in the Yemen island of Socotra. Membership costs £12 a year and for that members receive two bulletins and can attend meetings held in UK and elsewhere. Further information on

membership is available from the African Bird Club, c/o Birdlife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, England.

### Rarities Committee formed in the UAE

The Emirates Bird Records Committee has formed in Abu Dhabi and includes Erik Hirschfeld (Chairman), Colin Richardson (Secretary), Simon Aspinall, John Bannon and Steve James. The Committee will assess reports of rare birds in the United Arab Emirates and review old records as necessary. In areas of doubt, outside specialist opinions may be sought to ensure the fairness and accuracy of the Committee's decisions. Bird records will remain in the care of Colin Richardson for the whole UAE, while Steve James will receive records on behalf of the Emirates Natural History Group. The Committee held its first meeting on 17 October 1993 and will meet three times each year in future.

The 1991 list of UAE bird species, published in *Tribulus* 1:2 will continue as the official bird list, forming the basis for future additions and updates. It is the intention to publish all newly accepted records and any updates to the UAE list in the annual *Emirates Bird Report* or in *Tribulus*. Observers, including shortstay visitors to the UAE, should submit their sightings to the Bird Recorder, Colin Richardson EBRC, PO Box 50394, Dubai, UAE. (Tel/Fax Dubai (+9714) 313378) for assessment and inclusion in the annual bird report and the central record.

### Talk on the 1993 OSME Survey of Yemen

Richard Porter, who led the OSME survey to eastern Yemen in Spring 1993 will give a talk to the *Society of Arabian Studies* at 17.30 hours, on 16 March 1994 at The Lecture Theatre, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1E 0XG. The meeting is open to OSME members and ABBA contributors.

## Photos needed for *PHOENIX*

Photos of Arabian breeding birds, their nests, eggs and habitats etc are welcomed for inclusion in future issues of *Phoenix*. Photos may be printed with just a caption, for their aesthetic value, or can be submitted to illustrate notes and papers. Photos may be in colour or black and white (glossy or matt), slides, prints or negatives, so long as they have good contrast.

## How to obtain *PHOENIX*

One issue of the *Phoenix* is published each year. It is issued free to all current contributors to the ABBA project and is sent to recent correspondents. A bundle of each issue is also passed to all natural history and similar groups active in Arabia. It is available on subscription for a single payment of £18 (\$34) for the next five issues, i.e. Nos 11 to 15 inclusive. (All subscribers will receive a reminder when their next subscription is due). *Phoenix* Nos 1-9 are available at £2 each (or the set for £12 plus £2 postage). Those leaving Arabia might be interested in placing a subscription order as the price represents a small sum for all the news of Arabian birds for five years. Will subscribers and observers please remember to advise any change of address.

## FOR SALE:

### ABBA survey summary reports and NCWCD technical reports of atlas surveys

To date, 14 ABBA surveys have been completed. For each survey a summary report is produced which is followed later by a full report prepared for the NCWCD, providing all the information collected on bird distribution and numbers. In line with the ABBA policy of making all information collected by the project available to those who want to use it, the summaries and full reports are copied to relevant libraries, museums and societies. In addition, a small number are available for sale. Reports of Surveys Nos 4 to 10, are currently available. (See details in the sales list accompanying this newsletter).

## The *PHOENIX*

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## Contributions to *PHOENIX*

Short articles relevant to the aims of the ABBA project are welcomed, especially notes on new breeding birds, the avifauna of specific areas or studies concerning particular species. Notices, requests for information and advertisements of reports, publications etc are inserted in *Phoenix* free of charge. Submissions need not necessarily be typed. Charges for commercial advertisements and loose inserts are available on request.

## Records wanted

Readers who have records of Arabian birds, however old, and whether published or not, who have not yet received the ABBA 'Instructions to Contributors' and a set of Atlas report forms, are urged to make contact with the Co-ordinator. Old records are especially valuable in assessing population changes and range expansions and contractions. Although the project concerns resident and breeding species, it is not only proved breeding information that is required, notes suggesting possible or probable breeding, particularly unusual breeding species is also very valuable. Information on exotics and escaped species, ringed birds and habitats is also needed.

## Credits

Word processing  
Lorraine Russell;  
desktop publishing  
Hilary Welch.  
Artwork; CJF Coombs  
(Socotra cormorant),  
Dave Showler (Socotra  
sunbird and Arabian  
accentor), Bill Morton  
(yellow-vented bulbul,  
Arabian babbler), Mike  
Langman (cattle egret,  
greater flamingo, corn  
bunting, common  
noddy and sooty  
falcon), Hilary Welch  
(malachite kingfisher,  
bimaculated lark).  
Maps, MCJ. Software  
and computer consultant  
Terry Rowell.  
Printed by Lakeshore  
Graphics, Nottingham.  
ham.

## Address

All correspondence for the Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Arabia and *Phoenix* should be sent to: Michael C Jennings, Co-ordinator ABBA, 1 Warners Farm, 2 Warners Drove, Somersham, Cambridgeshire, PE17 3HW, UK. (Telephone 0487 841733; Fax 0487 843270)

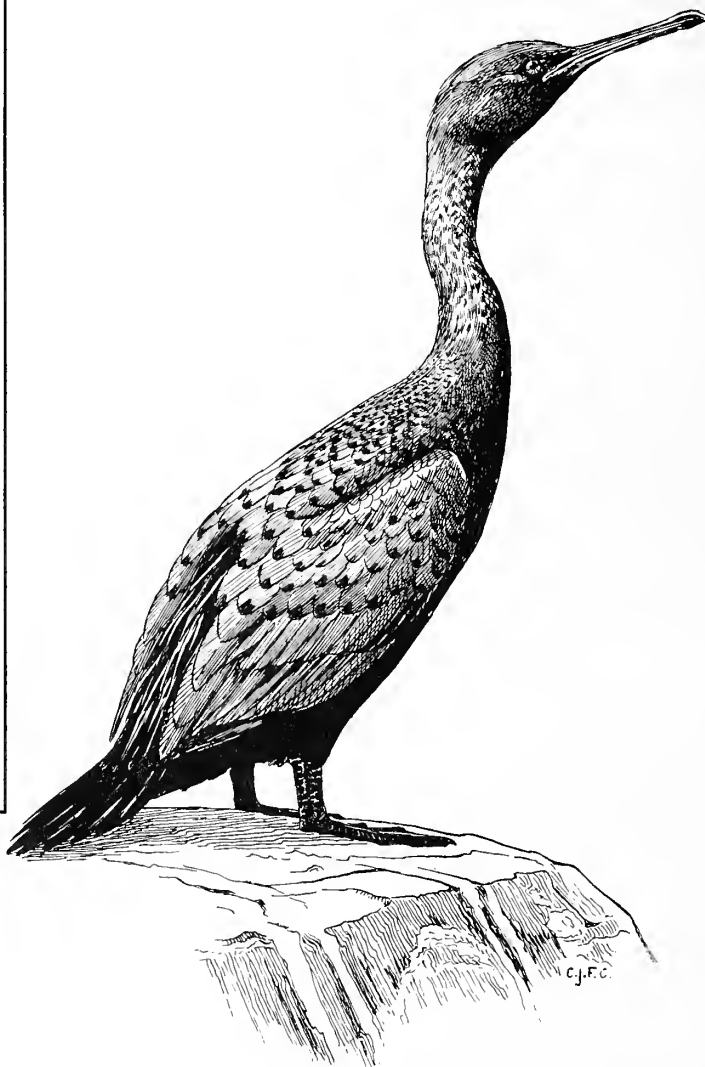


Fig 15 Socotra cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*. Nests with young on North Yassat island (SB26) March 1993 and Ghagha island (RB25) April 1993, UAE but no evidence of breeding on Delma island SA25/26 September 1993 (S J Aspinall).

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